

I NEVER LEFT HOME

by Bob Hope

Illustrated by Carl Rose



SIMON AND SCHUSTER, NEW YORK

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B. H. to G. L.

N O T E

Names of people, places, and outfits have sometimes been changed or omitted entirely for purposes of security or because of lousy memory.

B. H.

PREFACE

I SAW YOUR sons and your husbands, your brothers and your sweethearts.

I saw how they worked, played, fought, and lived. I saw some of them die. I saw more courage, more good humor in the face of discomfort, more love in an era of hate, and more devotion to duty than could exist under tyranny.

I saw American minds, American skill, and American strength breaking the backbone of evil.

And then I came home to find people still living and thinking the way I lived and thought before I was given a look at sacrifice.

On the continent of Europe, in the air above that continent, and over Africa, India, Asia, and the islands of the Pacific, American blood is buying our future security, a lifetime option on the freedom we were all born to.

And I came back to find people exulting over the thousand-plane raids over Germany . . . and saying how wonderful they are! Those people never watched the face of a pilot as he read a bulletin board and saw his buddy marked up missing. Those thousand-plane raids are wonderful only because of the courage and spirit of the men who make them possible.

Until a lot more of us realize what our men have gone through in planes and tanks, in landing barges and on foot in the jungle, desert, and on the beaches, it's going to be tough to talk to the men coming back. And in the case of those who aren't doing all they should, it's going to be tougher to look them in the eye.

I didn't see very much. And God knows I didn't do any fighting. But I had a worm's eye view of what war is.

Dying is sometimes easier than living through it.

But dying is always harder than what we at home are asked to do. We can't give until it hurts, because it doesn't hurt to give money. It doesn't make us bleed a bit to buy bonds.

Yet those men I saw in England and Africa and Sicily, those men who have flown the flak-filled skies over Germany and given their blood and their sight and their limbs—those men who really give till it hurts—they also buy bonds.

We at home would understand all this better if every one of us could go through a few hospital wards, stop at a few emergency dressing stations, pray for our own courage in operating rooms as we watched twelve and eighteen teams of steel-fingered surgeons perform miracles of science on men who had performed miracles of courage.

These men in hospitals couldn't be subjected to the indignity of organized tours through the wards. They've given enough. But if there were some way for more people to see the outer fringes of war as I did, we would need less urging, less exhorting, and less driving to buy bonds. Less? We wouldn't need any.

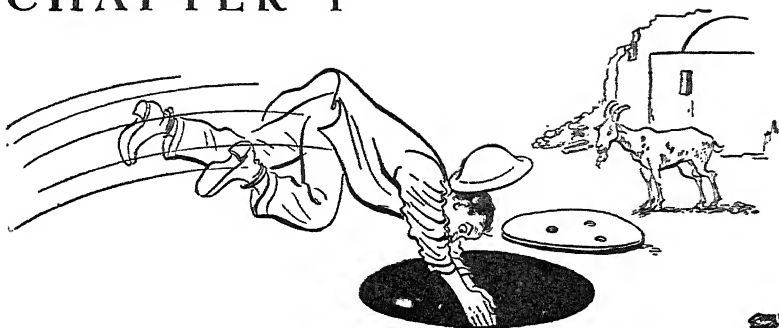
But this is not a book about the serious side of the war. That isn't my field. All I want you to know is that I did see your sons and your daughters in the uniforms of the United States of America . . . fighting for the United States of America.

I could ask for no more.

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CHAPTER 1



Hope Springs Eternally, for Cover

ONE afternoon in Bizerte I heard a great big tank driver from Texas ask another soldier, "What's all this crowd for? What's going on?"

His buddy said, "Bob Hope's going to do a show for us."

The first guy said, "You mean Bob Hope followed us all the way to Bizerte? I volunteered to serve my country, but damn it, this is ridiculous. I hear he even follows the casualties right into the hospitals."

His buddy said, "Don't forget Frances Langford's here too."

The Texas guy said, "That's what I mean. Who needs Hope?"

But I'd heard enough. He couldn't knock me. I walked right up to him and said, "Listen, soldier, maybe you don't like me. But I've played so many camps back in the States, the U.S.O. thought it was time I came over here to try to boost the morale."

"What can you do to boost the morale of the guys over here?" Tex asked.

"Nothing!" I said. "But just knowing I'm over here in

Africa makes the G.I.s in the States feel safe for a little while."

After that Tex kind of softened up, and there was the usual formality about my autograph. But I finally made him take it.

After over three years of broadcasting from camps and military installations, I've got the uniformed forces pretty well confused. They don't know which they're getting more of . . . beans or corn.

It's still a military secret or I'd be able to explain that my camp broadcasts not only furnished the basic idea—they also supplied most of the raw material used in the development of powdered eggs. This was a natural thing, however, since the records show that I was the first comedian, either here or in Europe, who ever laid khaki eggs.

But I have learned a lot about our servicemen. For instance, sailors are the only ones who roll when they walk. All the others do it from a kneeling position.

Sailors are also the toughest audiences to get real big belly laughs from. But I suppose that's natural. How can you expect a guy to double up in those kind of pants? But these are just details.

When I got to North Africa I was surprised to find that the soldiers weren't any different from those in training in the United States and England. What gave me the idea that having been in battle would change American guys, I don't know. I'm glad I was wrong.

Doing shows in Africa was just like being at Camp Callan or any other big training center in southern California, except that the local jokes were different. The guys had the same tense expectancy about the show. The same tense expectancy as that tank driver I just mentioned. But that didn't stop me. I sent Jack Pepper, Tony Romano, and Frances out to break the ice, and when they softened up the audience I walked on with:

"Hiya, fellow tourists! Well, I'm very happy to be here [boos]—course I'm leaving as soon as I finish the show. But this is a great country, Africa . . . this is Texas with Arabs. I was on the road to Morocco once . . . this time I'm doing it the hard way. And I tried to find a few Lamours over here, but they all wear their sarongs a little higher . . . under their eyes. And, boys, don't ever lift one of those napkins. I did, and what happened to me shouldn't happen to a Crosby horse. What I saw! A B-bag with legs! Anyway, I'm happy to be here. But boy, isn't it hot? Is it true the scorpions take salt tablets?" More jokes . . . songs . . . jokes . . . eggs . . . more songs . . . more jokes . . .

That first evening in Bizerte was as pretty an evening as I've ever seen. There was absolutely nothing to disturb my peace of mind except the antiaircraft gun I was leaning against. But then as long as the gun wasn't kicking, why should I?

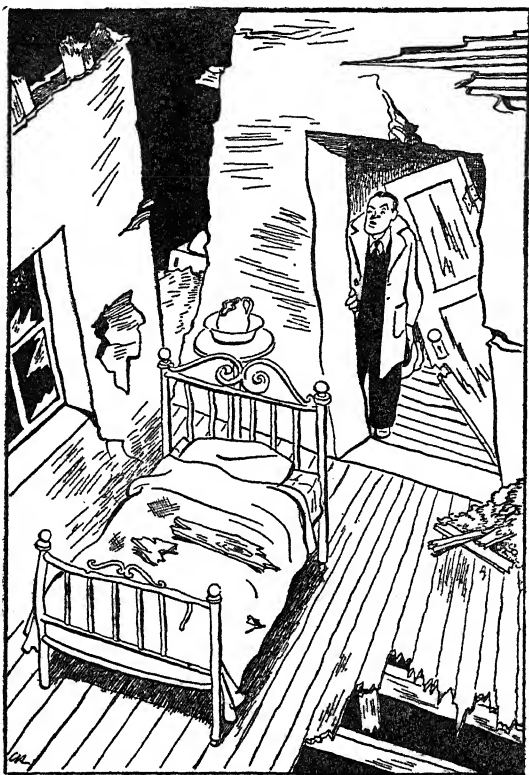
We were sitting in deck chairs on the roof of the Hôtel Transatlantique overlooking Bizerte. That was hard to do, because our airmen *hadn't* overlooked Bizerte.

The Italians and Germans had picked up a few rumors that a bunch of American and British guys were planning to move into the neighborhood. This figured to bring about a slump in real estate.

Whenever a lot of strangers move in all at once it causes a neighborhood to run down. So the Italians and Germans decided to leave Bizerte flat. To show you how co-operative we are, our Twelfth Air Force flattened it for them.

This was spectacular, but it made it rough on the entertainers who moved into Bizerte after the troops. A guy with a good supply of Scotch tape could have come into town and sold his entire supply to Frances Langford, Tony Romano, Jack Pepper, and a few staff officers who were anxious to paste together their hotel rooms. It was a nice hotel, though.

All the rooms were outside. In fact, some of them were outside the city limits. There was a sign in the lobby saying, "Keep your door locked at all times. It holds up the walls."



It was a nice hotel, though. All the rooms were outside.

But I liked it because in case of emergency I could reach my arm through the wall and wake up the whole unit. Sometimes, I even got my arm back. In Bizerte if you asked for room and board you wanted the board to patch the window. If you pulled the shade down, the building came down with it.

But it was a pretty evening. It could have been a night in

Palm Beach or Santa Barbara. And at least one person in the party wished it was.

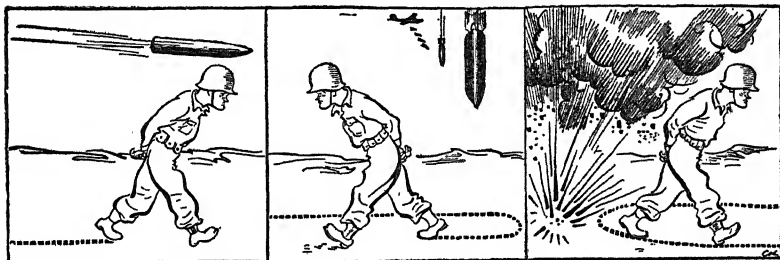
We'd checked in at the hotel about ten p.m. At eleven everything was perfectly peaceful except that I just couldn't shrug off the war. The soldiers we were talking with seemed perfectly able to forget it. For some reason or other war doesn't seem to worry soldiers.

People tell me that's because it's their business. If this is true, they're the only men in the world who don't worry about business. That's one of the reasons I'm sure I wouldn't make a good soldier. I'd worry.

It seemed silly to worry, though, looking at a path of moonlight that crossed the water to the romantic island of Sicily. In the harbor were hundreds of little boats. Higgins boats, LCMs, LCTs, LCIs, LCPs. Every type of LC was there except Elsie the Cow. What a hit she would have been in North Africa! But then it was so dry she'd probably have given powdered milk.

You may not believe it, but all these combat and transport craft looked very attractive in the moonlight. Even a civilian could figure how they might attract as many Nazi bombers as there were within striking distance.

Believe me, no yacht basin in Santa Barbara or Palm Beach ever saw such a flotilla. What the scratch navy of catch-as-catch-can craft from the British Isles did in taking English-



I'm sure I wouldn't make a good soldier. I'd worry.

men from Europe these carefully planned and beautifully practical little boats were standing ready to do in reverse. They were going to put Englishmen, and this time Americans too, on the continent of Europe. The harbor was jammed with every type of bottom needed to carry every kind of equipment a bunch of G.I.s might require to spend the winter in Italy.

And all around us for miles outside of Bizerte were guys going without sleep, always alert, their eyes constantly on their objective . . . then Langford pulled down her shade. Thousands upon thousands of guys in tan suits and tin toupees were on the desert waiting for a trip that had once tempted many an American tourist. They were getting ready to visit Naples. There's an old, old saying, "See Naples and die." Many did.

But on our first evening in Bizerte it was peaceful enough on the roof of the Hôtel Transatlantique, except that I kept imagining I heard planes. The soldiers were kind of amused at my imagination. Pretty soon my imagination got so strong that the ack-ack boys out on the point began throwing flak at it.

The officers on the roof of the Transatlantique didn't have to worry, however. An air raid didn't mean anything to them. They were off duty. But finally it got so bad that everyone casually sauntered downstairs. I found the banister had splinters in it.

I was glad Frances and Tony and Jack and I had gotten in at least one show for the men around Bizerte. I was glad we'd laid a few of our own eggs before Jerry came over with his. It would have been a shame to have come all the way from Tunis to Bizerte just to be promoted from a noncombatant to a casualty. It would have been a shame to miss those solid Bizerte belly laughs . . . and they really were gutsy giggles.

We'd put on our show for about ten thousand guys before even checking into town. That was good booking, too. If

we'd copped a gander at the Transatlantique before our show, we might not have had so much enthusiasm for our work.

I'll never forget that show. I say I'll never forget it. I'd completely forgotten it a couple of hours later sliding down the banisters as the tracer bullets were trying to pick German bombers out of the sky. It's coming back to me, however. This means I couldn't have been as scared as I thought I was. I guess nobody could have been that scared and lived.

Thinking it over, we hadn't done anything different than we'd done in England and in Tunis. I still don't know what there was about that first show in Bizerte that made the Germans come over.

How they even got wind of it I'll never know. The wind was from the other direction.

The moon was still shining across the water in that nice quiet Palm Beach way when we left the hotel to take shelter from the bombers. No kidding, that moon looked as cool and unconcerned as Lionel Barrymore taking a physical. And as distant and aloof as a blonde debutante watching two guys fighting over her at the Stork Club.

The moon, too, looked inviting. I remember wondering if people lived on it. And if they used Pepsodent. And if they took in boarders. And how you could get in touch with them.

As the ack-ack got heavier, my longing for what my veterinarian would call a complete change of scene became more and more urgent.

If you paid attention to all those maps they printed in the papers during the African campaign, you'll remember that Bizerte is hardly more than a long water hole from Sicily. It lies on a little strait leading into an almost land-locked bay called Lake Bizerte. Lake Bizerte is a wonderful harbor for all those boats they needed to take the stuff across to Italy. That's what made the Germans anxious to drop anything they had anywhere in the neighborhood.

And anywhere in the neighborhood was about as close as they ever came to the spots they really wanted to hit. The MP whose job it was to keep us out of lethal trouble met us at the entrance of the hotel and hollered, "We'll have to hurry. They're starting to activate the fog-pots."

"What's he mean by that?" Pepper asked without slowing up. Those fat guys can't only run: they can talk while they're running . . . when a Messerschmitt is chasing them.

"What's this fog-pot routine?" I asked the MP.

"When the Jerries come over we light the smudge-pots and smoke over the town so the bombers can't see their targets. That's why we gotta hurry to get outta town."

"I'm way ahead of you," I said. "You're just talking about getting out of town, I'm dreaming of getting out of North Africa. I didn't come all the way over here to become a smoked ham. A couple of more love scenes with Lamour would have fixed that."

But the smoke-pots did one thing for me. They gave the place a homelike touch. The smoke-pots made it seem like the orange country around Hollywood on a frosty night. It was exactly the same, even to my goose-pimples.

As the MP explained, the principle of this fogging-up is to obscure the whole target under a heavy blanket of smoke. Mother used to tell me I wasn't safe just putting my head under a blanket. She's still right. The smoke cover makes it impossible for the raiders to aim at important targets. So they just let go with all they have right into the blanket. And when they do that, you're not safe.

That's why it's best to get beyond the synthetic fog. I kept whistling "Get out of Town." Our MP said, "We ought to get at least a mile outside the walls of Bizerte." I said, "Let's not be stingy . . . let's make it five." I never rode in a jeep that went so slowly. Twice we touched the ground.

All of a sudden a couple of red tracer bullets came pretty close over our heads and the MP hollered, "Get out and get under something."

For the first time in my life I wished I was a gopher. I could hardly lift my feet. This was partly fear and partly because the whole time I was in Africa I wore G.I. shoes. I think they saved my puppies. They could have saved all of me. Those G.I. brogans are really fox-holes with laces.



Those G. I. brogans are really fox-holes with laces.

The MP kept hollering, "Don't just stand there, Hopel Crawl in here!"

I said, "That's a sewer!"

"Listen, Mac, you're lucky to get in anywhere at this hour! Don't argue! I'm supposed to be responsible for your safety!"

Another tracer bullet went zinging overhead, so I climbed into the sewer. I hated to think of anything happening to me that might embarrass the MP.

Have you ever crawled into a North African sewer? If you have there's nothing I can tell you about it. If you haven't, believe me, you can omit it from your postwar plans.

On the way into our sewer sanctuary Jack Pepper suddenly screamed, "I dropped my teeth." These fat guys are always thinking of eating.

When the raid was over he found the teeth had fallen into his pocket as we scrambled down the hill. Shows what a mixed-up bunch we were, Pepper with his teeth in his pocket and me with my heart in my mouth.

Tony kept wondering what to do. He was too skinny to protect his guitar. And his guitar was too flimsy to protect him. And Frances, good old "Mother Langford," all she kept saying was, "Are you all right, boys?" What a gal!

The raid turned out to be nothing more than an attempt at reconnaissance. I honestly don't think it had anything to do with our being in Bizerte. But try to make the soldiers around there believe that.

As soon as the all-clear sounded we hurried back to the hotel, which was like hurrying back to a severe case of D.T.s. A few bombs had been dropped, just to make the raid look good, and the hotel people were again busy pasting our rooms together.

Most of this work was being done by the bellhops. They were German prisoners. When one picked up my bag and said, "Follow me upstairs," I felt like Mussolini on his last trip to Brenner Pass. I proceeded cautiously.

Finding out they spoke English, I asked one Heinie what he thought of the way the war was going. He shrugged his shoulders and said, "What can I say?"

This made me sore. I figured he could at least have said he was sorry. I wouldn't have cared whether he meant he was sorry it was going sour for his side, or sorry his gang started it. I just wanted to see a German sorry about something. I'm sure some day I will.

It was about three A.M. before our rooms were patched up enough for us to start getting ready for bed. Of course, there wasn't much getting ready to do. You couldn't take a bath. My room did have hot and cold running . . . I don't know what they were, but they were running. They were the only things that weren't turned off with the water system at five

P.M. If you want to sponge off before going to bed, you have to fill your bathtub with water before you leave your room in the morning. And, of course, no chance for a shower unless you run into a wet sheep dog.

I didn't know this, or I would have wired ahead to reserve a bathtub full of bubble-bath. And don't think North Africa isn't a place where a guy can appreciate a few bubbles, with or without Sally Rand. I won't say it's too dusty there, but it's the only place in the world where you spit cement.

And there's no such thing as hot water at any time. It's always too warm to drink and too cold to rinse out your undies. They keep it in great big cans. So when I said the water system was shut off, the use of the word "system" was just flattery, unless you could call a bucket a system.

Well, it was about three A.M. when I started getting ready for bed. And, in view of what I had to do, it was about three A.M. when I finished getting ready for bed and climbed under my mosquito bar. I was a tired boy. I could have slept on anything—anything but that bed. Before I climbed into it I thought nothing could keep me awake. I'm always wrong!

In Africa I learned why those hunks of mosquito netting they hang over the beds are called mosquito bars. Thousands of mosquitoes out on the town sneaked in . . . and I was the bar. It turned out later that those mosquitoes are just air cover for the greatest assortment of terrible-looking big bugs in the world. No kidding, those were the first mosquitoes I ever saw with guns mounted on their wings. The tank men told me that North Africa is the only place in the world where they have armor-piercing termites.

Guys who have been in the South Pacific claim they can match North Africa bug for bug and have enough brand-new types of bugs left over to frighten the entire city of New York. I'm going to find out, I hope. (Watch for *Through the South Pacific with Black Flag and Flit Gun.*)

But I wasn't thinking of the South Pacific as I lay trying

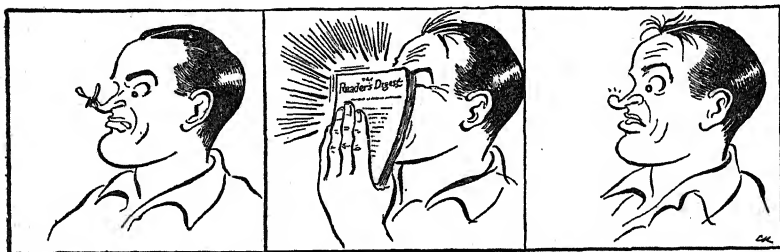
to go to sleep. I wasn't thinking of anything but a comfortable home in California, a comfortable, clean bed, screened windows, a place where the occasional sound of a fighter plane was just a friendly little P-38 so fresh off the assembly line at Lockheed that it still smelled of Chanel #5.

The only defense I had against the power diving mosquitoes was a light-caliber *Reader's Digest* I'd slipped under my pillow to improve my mind. It would have taken the Christmas issue of *Esquire* to stun those insects. I'm sure the Christmas *Esquire* would have done it, because it's always full of stunning stuff.

All I had, however, was *Reader's Digest*. I'd start to read something to improve my knowledge of world affairs, but before my I.Q. even fluttered I was dozing off. And before I knew I was dozing off, one of those mosquitoes would start skip-bombing my nose. I'd swing on it with everything in my magazine. And after I missed it in the air, I'd slap at it as it sat near my receding hairline, drinking the tomato juice that the Red Cross Blood Bank tells me flows through my veins.

Every time I'd swat a mosquito, a great big red lump would appear, and, of course, what I was worried about was malaria. Apparently I'm immune. Not one of those mosquitoes got it from me.

At about four forty-five the aerial battle under my mosquito bar was still in progress, but I was too weakened by



***Every time I'd swat a mosquito, a great big red lump
would appear.***

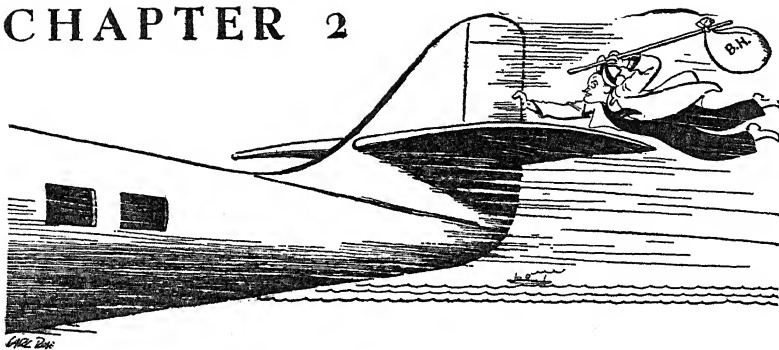
fatigue to continue putting up effective resistance. By five o'clock in the morning the battle had ended. Either they ran out of fuel or I ran out of blood. At five one I was sound asleep. At five two a convoy of trucks started rolling through Bizerte.

A truck rumbled right over my ear lobe every thirty seconds, and every time this happened the whole building quivered. I thought of phoning the office to ask what time the hotel left for Algiers. But I didn't. It wouldn't have made things any easier for anyone. It wouldn't have been very funny. And besides, there wasn't any phone in the room.

Who was I to be kicking? The Army was doing everything in the world to protect me. While just across a narrow neck of water to the north a bunch of guys I'd played for when they were in training at the California-Arizona Desert Training Centers were facing death on the beaches, in the olive groves and the vineyards of Sicily. I wondered if I'd ever get there.

I also wondered why I'd ever left home. I thought of all the trouble I'd gone to. The arrangements that had to be made. The shots I had to have. The endless days of waiting around New York with nothing to do but the monotony of going to the theater . . . eating fine food . . . sitting around "21" . . . and sleeping on inner-coil mattresses. And then at the last minute, just before leaving, I saw on my traveling order where it said about the seventy-seven pounds of luggage. And I had to rush out and buy sixteen pounds of stuff I didn't need to get up to quota. Imagine! Seventy-seven pounds of baggage! That's a lot of tooth paste. But I sold every tube.

CHAPTER 2



It's Nice to Know Your Act's Going Over

I DON'T care how many thousand miles you've flown, it gives you a big thrill to think about going vroom! across the Atlantic. Such high-altitude plane travel is for important people like generals and diplomats and statesmen. I mean, nobody gets space on a transatlantic Clipper unless he makes a pretty big splash.

The thought of traveling in such stylish company fills you with pride at the importance you've attained in the world. And you can't help wondering who takes diplomatic precedence blowing up a rubber life raft.

You have plenty of time to think about things like blowing up rubber rafts while you're waiting around New York. And every time you pass a toy store you feel like going in to buy a few balloons to practice on.

The thing you keep remembering, as you wait for a call to get ready, is that it all started so easy. None of us ever remember that when a thing is made very easy for a man to do, there's a reason *why* it's that easy.

Signing up to play the European Theater hadn't been any harder than signing to play any other theater. Easier, in fact. There weren't all those little formalities about salaries and

percentages. The pay is standard, and when it comes to expenses . . . you have them.

Playing the European Theater, or any theater of war, is a good thing for actors. It's a way of showing us that there's something more important than billing; or how high your radio Crossley is; or breaking the house record in Denver. If any performer wants some idea of what his or her appearance means to our men offshore, read part of a letter from Lieutenant E. E. Churchill, of the Forty-ninth Fighter Squadron:

To see you and all the rest brings a quick realization that America and all her people whom we love so dearly are really not far away but right beside us, pulling for us all the time. That the good old U. S. is still "cookin' with gas" right this minute, and the dreams we left behind us there are more than dreams—they really exist.

So you see how a laugh or two and seeing people from the States clears up our vision which gradually seems to get mixed up with blurred images of "Jerry" fighters boring down on you with guns spouting flame and lead. With smoke in your eyes you see your buddy going down. Then Jerry throwing everything he can up at us with his ack-ack. Now and then hitting our boys. These and a million other impressions try to drive away our dreams and plans of the life we love back home. So, again, may I say many, many thanks to you for bringing us closer to the land we love.

It's letters like that which prove there's something *much* more important than billing, Crossley, and breaking the house record in Denver. And the hundreds of young, unknown performers who are regularly touring with U.S.O. Camp Shows, all over the world, are returning much wiser people and much better performers than they were when they left the States.

People in show business used to wonder where the actors of the future would get their training, after most of vaudeville folded up into Radio City. Well, ironical as it may seem, a global war's apparently the answer. After all, the U.S.O. has turned out to be nothing more than the Loew Circuit with fox-holes. Even the ushers are G.I. Only they don't call them ushers. They call them MPs. And they don't take you to your seat. They grab you by it.

But the thought of fox-holes didn't worry me. I thought I knew all about fox-holes when I signed up for Europe. Frances, Tony, Jerry Colonna, and I had "dug" some of the remote outposts in Alaska and on the Aleutian Islands. But after I'd signed up for England and Africa I began to realize that while the trip north hadn't been exactly a dry-run, it was far from the shattering action that got hotter and hotter as you got closer and closer to the paper hanger's Festung Europa.

Alaska and the Aleutians seemed safer than they probably were, because they are such lonesome country. But the Coast Guard can tell you there was some rugged action in the Aleutians. When you think what went on at Kasserine Pass, Salerno, and Cassino, though, the only reason to get cold feet in Alaska was the climate.

We were heading for England, which had undergone a terrific blitz and, as far as we knew, was still blitzable. North Africa was also vulnerable. And going from place to place by air in an A war zone was bound to be a little risky.

Of course, there's a gentlemen's agreement that no unarmed Clippers will be attacked. But everyone knows the agreement isn't worth the gentlemen it was written by. And there's no consolation in trying to tell yourself the Nazis don't want you. They may be after much bigger fish, but there's no game warden to make them throw back the little ones.

As the time drags by and your imagination continues to

work overtime, New York City gets to be more and more like a dentist's waiting room with current magazines. It isn't exactly as if you're scared. But it isn't exactly as if you're not.

On the other hand, the whole time isn't spent in worrying. There are an awful lot of things that have to be done. And another thing, you can't go blabbing to everybody you meet that you're on your way to the European Theater of Operations. You are a military secret. And so are your comings and goings.

I guess that's why you really don't worry much. Worrying's no good unless you can tell people about it. It's a kind of suffering that has to be seen to be appreciated by the sufferer. What's the use of going around with your drawn face all out of drawing if, when people ask you what's wrong, you can't tell them?

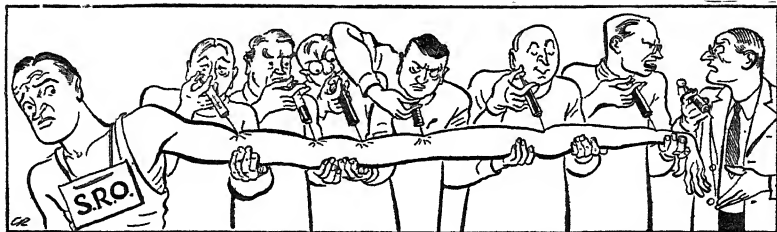
The only thing that could possibly have given anyone a clue that I was constantly alerted to leave town at a moment's notice was the fact that the bags under my eyes were packed. All in all, I think we were in town five or six nights before we finally took off. I say "five or six" because there was one night I lost track of everything.

The very first thing we had to do when we hit New York was to start our course of inoculations. I say start. I mean continue. I'd had my first typhoid shot at Camp Perry, in Toledo.

It didn't bother me a bit. I was just up all night, afraid to move my arm and suffering more chills and fever than I'd had since the last time I got the cold shoulder from a hot tomato. As soon as I hit New York I went right to bed. I just mention this to show what a hero I can be if I try.

Besides jabbing you against typhoid, they jab you against tetanus, they scratch you against smallpox, they keep giving you the needle for four days. I got hit with the hypodermic so many times I felt like a dart board with legs.

Some people faint every time they're given a shot with a



They keep giving you the needle for four days.

needle. I often wonder why. It's certainly not because it hurts. The doctors don't seem to know how to diagnose it. But they say they think I'll get over it.

To show you how foolish it was for me to take all those shots, I didn't catch a thing the whole time I was abroad.

Really, judging by the job those medical boys did on us before we were allowed to leave the country, you'd think Congress had slapped an embargo on germs. Then Army Intelligence talked to us. But anybody could be intelligent who asked all the questions they ask.

Finally we were mugged, front and profile, neither of which is the best view of me, and our identification papers and passports were given to us. Before we left, the F.B.I. also gave us a light going over. Fortunately, they didn't recognize me.

Finally, we had our money changed into traveler's checks. You're only allowed to take a certain amount out of the country. I didn't bring any of it back. The soldiers have an interesting little game they play with two spotted cubes.

With all the mechanical details taken care of, we spent the rest of our waiting time learning a few new songs and collecting anything in the way of material that we felt we could use. I stocked up on vitamin pills.

I wired Johnny Mercer, the song writer, for a hunk of special material, and he wrote a song for me called "Propaganda," which was a big hit over in Africa. This will be no news at all to Mercer fans.

Tony, Jack, and Frances picked up as much sheet music as they thought they'd need, and I went up to see Bill Robinson about learning a new dance routine or two to do for the guys.

"What steps do you know?" Bill asked.

I danced a little bit for Bill, and he said, "What do you want to learn *dancing* for? I like what *you* do."

Everybody was so co-operative that the only thing tough about waiting around New York was trying to find something to say to everyone who asked me, "What are *you* doing in New York?"

Nobody ever asked me that question before. Sometimes after I hadn't been back to "21" or El Morocco for six or seven months, somebody would ask me if I'd been away. But now everyone wanted to know what I was doing in town.

I was just as bad. I ran into Adolphe Menjou about the second day I was in New York. "Well, Dolphi!" I said. "What are *you* doing in New York?"

The next time I spoke to him was in London, but that wasn't the next time he spoke to me. I was riding up Park Avenue in an open-topped cab, and we stopped for a red light. Across the little park that runs down the center of Park Avenue, the downtown traffic was also waiting for the green light. Suddenly a guy jumps up on the seat of a cab going downtown, sticks his head through the roof, and hollers, "Hey, Bob! Hey, Hope!" It was Dolph.

He was waving his arms like a fan dancer without a fan, trying to indicate something. But not what the fan dancer would be indicating. The traffic started. Almost in a frenzy Dolph pointed grandly in the general direction that I expected to be traveling, as soon as the U.S.O. gave me the word, and shouted, "Tonight! Tonight!" His voice was so ecstatic and his gestures so grand a few people applauded. Dolph milked them for three bows.

Of course I did get to see a few shows while in New York. But I was never comfortable. Every time anyone came down the aisle after the performance had started, I figured it must

be the usher to tap me on the back and tell me to go to my room. Then one night it happened.

I was at *Oklahoma!* Just before the finale the usher came tiptoeing down the aisle, tapped me on the back, and softly said, "Mr. Hope?"

"Yes," I whispered.

"Would you read this when you have time?" he said, handing me a manuscript. "I hear you buy jokes."

Right after the show I phoned Abe Lastfogel, President of the U.S.O. Camp Shows, and asked him if he couldn't hurry it up a little. Waiting around New York was beginning to get on my nerves. He promised to call Colonel Marvin Young of Special Service that night.

"Just take your time," he said. "Naturally we're anxious to get you out of the country as fast as possible."

What did he mean?

I went back to the Waldorf to wait. I spent so many days waiting at the Waldorf, the manager finally told me I'd have to rent a room.

I kept reading and rereading the letter of instructions from Laurence Phillips, the Vice-President of the U.S.O. Camp Shows. There was one paragraph I always seemed to keep coming back to:

In general it is expected that you will be quartered at hotels, although on occasion it may be necessary that you will be quartered on an Army reservation. In the former case the Army will expect to pay for your room and three meals a day. It will not, however, pay for any personal items such as refreshments, cleaning, and laundry.

"Laundry!" We had it. And we did it ourselves. But I'm jumping the gun and giving away the plot of this whole thing. The whole trip was really nothing but somebody's idea that I ought to learn to wash shirts. As if I hadn't

learned how, playing split weeks on the Interstate Time one winter.

Finally the U.S.O. phoned and said we were leaving that night at one A.M. The next thing I knew I was saying good-by to people in the Marine Terminal at Pan American's La Guardia Field base. I say I was saying good-by to people.



I spent so many days waiting at the Waldorf, the manager finally told me I'd have to rent a room.

I was saying good-by to my wife, who was the only person who didn't have to ask me why I was in New York.

Naturally we'd gotten to the airport too early. That's murder, waiting around. You've said everything there is to say. And after about thirty-six choruses of "Thanks for the Memory" whistled casually through your teeth, people's ears begin to ache. So do your teeth.

We went through the customs and immigration stuff as nicely as General Terry Allen's First Division took over Gafsa. And there was nothing left to do but continue whistling through my teeth and wait for the starting bell. When the bell finally did ring it sounded more like a school bell. All of a sudden I felt as if I was in Cleveland again, and for a split second I wished I was.

They'd let only Clipper passengers past a certain gate. So I kissed Dolores good-by and said, "Well."

She said, "Well."

Doesn't sound like a very big emotional scene, but it was. I could tell what she was thinking by the way she looked into my eyes. They looked as if I'd gotten the mercurochrome bottle instead of the collyrium. Finally she pulled my head down and whispered, "Take care of yourself."

Without a moment's hesitation I said, "I will."

We were both conscious that this wasn't the kind of good-by they have in the movies. The dialogue was wrong. I have a suspicion it always is . . . in the movies.

Finally Dolores came up with something. She said, "Please be careful!"

"I told you I would," I said.

"Well, do," she said.

"I will," I said.

"All aboard!" the guard said.

We kissed, and I started down the ramp toward the big ship alone. There were other passengers. But I felt alone. I had that kind of deserted feeling way down inside; the kind

of empty sensation you can't cure by eating. There was an awful lot going on where I was heading.

The airport was all dimmed out. None of the other passengers had much to say. About all you could hear was the lapping of Long Island Sound against the hull of the Clipper.

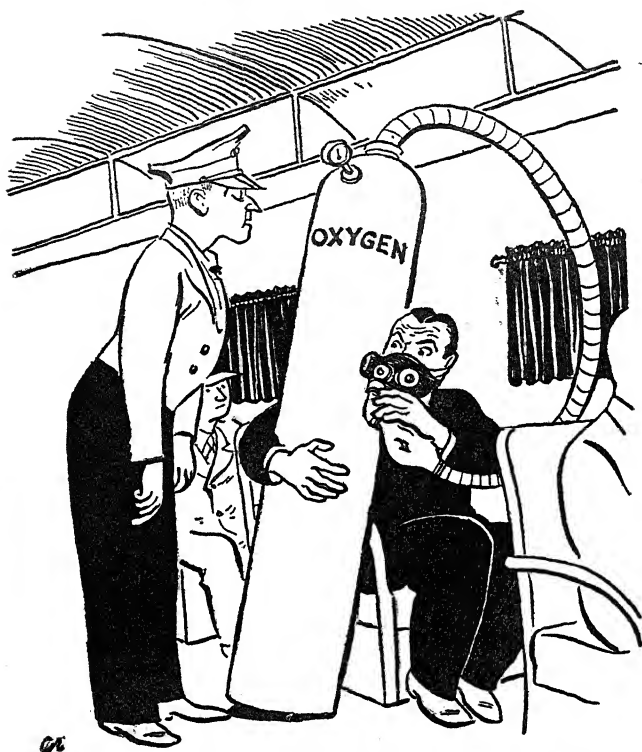
I wondered what was going on in the other people's minds. There were sixteen or seventeen besides the four of us. Every one of them, I felt sure, had a more important and probably more dangerous mission in Europe. And I felt like a kid who was going to a new school for the first time, wondering if he can cut it, hoping he'll be able to take whatever the other kids dish out . . . and wishing he'd got up with a runny nose so his mother would have kept him home in the first place.

We'd been in the plane about five minutes when my nose seemed to be bleeding. So I said to one of the stewards, "Would you mind telling me where the oxygen masks are? It's the altitude, I guess."

He said, "Certainly, sir. They're right in back of the plane. Anything else you'd like before we take off?"

It would be wonderful to be able to write something impressive about how I felt as the big Clipper rose from Long Island Sound, circled eastward, and passed over the Statue of Liberty. I can't. The plane was blacked out. All I knew was that Liberty was down there and that I was going to contact a bunch of guys who were seeing to it that she'd be down there when I got back. At the moment my chief concern was that the pilot shouldn't run out of C coupons.

There was only one other woman passenger on the trip besides Frances. She was one of Ambassador Winant's secretaries. This, of course, made us kind of proud of our Frances . . . a pride born of her behavior in Alaska. She topped that in England, Africa, and Sicily. Just a little gal from Florida who took whatever came along with a grace, dignity, and calm that, more than anything else, made her worthy of inclusion among the ten great women of 1943. But great!



"Anything else you'd like before we take off?"

Tony Romano had been with me in Alaska, too, and I knew that the wiry little guitar player from San Francisco had nerves steely enough to take the best and the worst that wind, weather, and enemy could dish out. In introducing Tony to our fellow passengers I said, "He's taking the place of Skinnay Ennis. Skinnay's in the Army. They're using him to clean rifles." That'll give you an idea how thin Skin used to be. (The Army's fattened him up.) Tony's slighter than Skinnay ever was.

Real radio fans remember that Tony was with Al Pierce for over seven years. Real musicians, the guys in 47 and 802, know Romano as one of the best guitarists in the racket.

Jack Pepper was a soldier. He was once half of a good vaudeville act called Salt and Pepper. I ran into him entertaining and jerking sodas in the officers' mess at Loew Field, in Texas. Jack was sort of a singing jerk.

When circumstances prevented Colonna from making the European trip, I arranged with the Army for Pepper to take his place. After Pepper had traveled all over Europe and the Army had seen him, they decided to shake Pepper and gave him an honorable discharge.

On the Clipper I told the people his draft classification was 2F2F . . . Too Fat to Fight. We had a whole routine about draft classifications. Tony's classification was 18G; that's single men with children. I was 7L—coward. Which reminds me, Pat O'Brien called up the other day to tell me about a guy who is 8F . . . that's a father of two 4Fs.

Up in Alaska we'd gotten into the habit of calling Frances "Mother Langford" because she always knew what was best and was always ready with comfort and advice. The Clipper hadn't left the water before we started calling Pepper "Aunt Biddie." He was the worrier of the group. He steered every plane we rode. Brought it in with body English. He fixed every broken microphone and P.A. system with nerve strain. And he never let us forget, for a moment, that something could happen to us.

That was us, on our way to England. The rest of the plane's company was made up of four mysterious youngsters who could have been a backfield coming home from a football game they'd lost, some diplomats, a few generals, and a couple of financiers.

You couldn't tell the diplomats and generals from the financiers unless you picked their pockets. Everyone was in civilian clothes because we were to land at Foynes, in neutral Eire. I never did find out who the four mysterious young men were. But the preferential treatment they got when we landed in Foynes really surprised me. Also one of the diplomats turned out to be a guy named Fred Barton from the

American Legion Magazine. He kept trying to promote us into doing a show for the passengers.

Between seven and eight the next morning our aerial bus made a breakfast stop somewhere in Nova Scotia. It looked like a good time to get some of that Nova Scotia salmon for breakfast. Salmon . . . that's herring wearing red underwear. But they told me the entire supply of Nova Scotia was constantly contracted for by Lindy's. That's a Broadway restaurant where song writers eat. The salmon is needed in morale work. Without Nova Scotia salmon, I understand, a song writer couldn't rhyme "childhood" and "wildwood."

By the time we got into the air again everything was very sociable on the plane. We all knew each other. What I mean is, Frances, Tony, Jack, and I knew each other and the crew of the Clipper knew us. But everyone spoke to everyone else, and the gin rummy games kept me busy. I had an awful time kibitzing on eight different games at once.

The Clipper carries quite a crew: captain, pilot, copilot, engineer, navigator, a couple of stewards, and extra men who can spell these guys when they need a rest. The first crew members we got acquainted with were the stewards. They're the boys who pass out the comfort. If they'd been from Mississippi instead of Ireland we might have gotten Southern Comfort.

The first thing I found out was that they don't make up the berths in the Clipper any more. I figured this must be due to the laundry situation. The steward told me it wasn't. It's just that they like to keep you alerted. But our two stewards took care of us fine.

They were James C. Rice, who had a face like an Irish Pat O'Brien, and Roger C. Pierrel. I called him "Pierre." Gave him a little class. I called Rice "Clancy" or "McGinty" or any Irish name I could think of. But he was always courteous to me. Always smiling, always gracious. He was always asking me questions about show business, like, "Mr. Hope, do you

really think that America's greatest living comedian is Jack Benny?"

If I made any attempt to top his crack, "Clancy" would just smile and say, "I'll laugh, Mr. Hope. Just tell me when."

I said, "Listen, I know you're a steward. But that's not the way you're supposed to brush me off. What's become of the famous Pan American courtesy?"

He just smiled and said I was the American they were panning.

On the flight between Nova Scotia and Newfoundland we did a little rehearsing. We ran through a few songs and tried out a few gags. And Fred Barton kept needling us. He kept popping his head into our section and saying, "When are you going to take a chance and let us hear some of this stuff?"

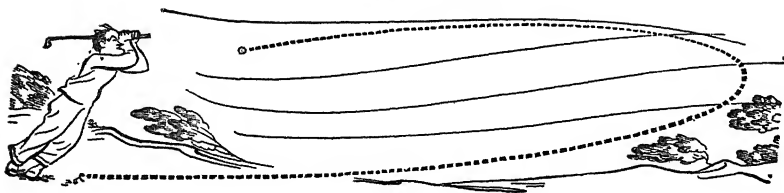
We told him we'd try it out when we got it in shape. But before we got a chance to try anything we did our first show in Newfoundland.

We stayed there a whole day before starting out for England. We were supposed to leave at two in the afternoon, and while we were laying over they asked us if we'd do a show for some of the RCAF's Coastal Command stationed there. They're the boys who help give the big convoys air cover as far out as their gas will last. They've done a lot to help beat the submarines. Brave bunch of kids. Great audience.

As soon as we'd finished the show for them—there were seven or eight hundred—we got ready to leave. But we didn't. The days up there are so short, it turns dark faster than one of those new pennies. And the weather had closed in so badly it wasn't safe to take off. So we played golf that afternoon. I found out that wasn't safe either.

Has anybody ever played golf at Botwood, Newfoundland? Then let me tell you about it. The wind is so tough you've got to keep ducking your own drives. I played eighteen holes and wound up about half a mile behind where I teed off.

That evening in the hotel I started my autograph collec-



*Has anybody ever played golf at Botwood,
Newfoundland?*

tion. I put on my bobby-socks and got the signatures of Lord Beaverbrook and Averell Harriman. They asked for mine, too. They got tired of seeing me on my knees. At the present time I have a collection of autographs that is really worth something. Every autograph is on money.

The next morning there was a little delay in taking off, so we dashed over to the military hospital, put on a quick show for everyone who could make it, and went right from there to the plane. It was a beautiful day. I've never seen the yonder so bright blue as when we took off into it.

We were sailing along under this bright blue blanket the poets laughingly call heaven, again rehearsing our jokes and mumbling through our songs, and again Fred Barton came in and asked, "When is opening night?"

"London in a few weeks," I said.

"You're on for the ship's concert right now," he said. So we threw together a little show for them.

When a joke didn't go over we always had the excuse that it's hard to hear in a four-motored Clipper ship.

The wind that had whipped my golf ball all over the Northeast the day before turned out to have other and greater strength. We were out over the Atlantic about nine hundred miles when suddenly the plane seemed to be turning in a wide arc. I called to my friend the steward, "Hey, O'Toole, what's cookin'?"

"We're going back," he said.

"Going back? What makes you think so?"

"We're turning around."

"Why?"

"I was so busy making you a sandwich the Captain didn't want to disturb me to explain."

When I asked Captain Vaughn why we were going back, he wasn't too busy to explain. He said, "The wind's against us."

I told him the wind was against me playing golf, but I didn't give up.

He pointed out that a Clipper with about thirty-two people on board is entitled to more care than a golf ball. "When the Clipper gets a certain distance out over the ocean," Captain Vaughn explained, "we check the gasoline supply, and then the whole crew decides whether we'll go on or turn back.

"We're supposed to hit the other side with a five-hundred-mile reserve of gasoline," Captain Vaughn went on. "That's in case we overshoot the field or if it's closed in. After checking the head winds we can expect from here to Ireland against our present position, we decided we could only make it with a two-hundred-mile reserve of gas, so we're turning back."

I said, "Thank you."

He said, "Not at all. I value my life as much as you value yours."

Do you think that's possible?

I understand that our Air Transport Command uses this same system in transocean flying. It's not quite as devil-may-care and romantic as the old days when it was considered sissy to turn back. But it saves a lot of lives and valuable equipment.

Two days later we were coming into Ireland early in the morning, and Captain Vaughn invited me up on the flight deck. That's like the bridge on a surface ship. It's loaded with instruments. And being there made me think of the last time

I'd been on the bridge of a ship. It was the *Queen Mary* in mid-Atlantic. A wireless had just informed us that England had declared war on Germany.

That was in August of 1939. Now, four years later, all but two months, I was on my way back, afraid to think of what I'd find when I tried to locate some of the places in England that I'd been most impressed with.

As we came into Ireland the sun was just rising, and we were hugging the clouds. Captain Vaughn explained that this was a precautionary measure. In case any sneak German plane was around, we could duck into the mist. I liked Captain Vaughn very much. He's a nice careful guy to have around.

From Foynes, Eire, to London there's a direct plane, but not everybody gets to ride on it. Unless you're pretty important you take a forty-mile drive to another airport where you get a plane for Bristol, England. Then you come on in from Bristol to London by train.

So we drove the forty miles and landed a few hours later in Bristol. That's where we got our first gander at what war really is.

We drove around Bristol while we were waiting for the train to take us to London. The rubble is all cleaned up and stacked in neat piles. The people pretend it isn't there. And there's plenty of stuff that isn't there that they don't have to pretend about.

I stood in the middle of the downtown business district of Bristol and looked for four blocks in one direction and five in another. And I'm not Superman. I can't look through buildings.

It made me think of a crack I heard Field Marshal Dill make when he was talking to the Boeing Aircraft employees up in Seattle. Dill said he heard an Englishwoman say, after an air attack, "One good thing about these bombings, they take your mind off the war."

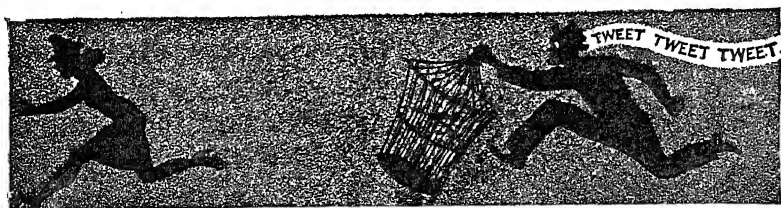
I didn't bother to shave on the train coming down from Bristol to London. I figured we'd just sneak into town. But we were met by a big bunch of WACS and WRENS—those are English WAVES—and the WRENS are some chicks. Speaking of WRENS, while we were in London the bobbies caught a guy walking around in the fog with a bird cage giving the mating call . . . but the American consul got me out.

There were also newspaper reporters at the station to meet us, and some newsreel men. Paramount hadn't forgotten me.

There I was, half asleep with my nice beard, smiling at the reception committee and the newsreel cameras, and looking like one of Jeff Davis' delegates. I really got an exciting reception. As soon as I arrived in London Winston Churchill left for Quebec to confer on war strategy with Roosevelt. War strategy . . . as I've often explained, that's diplomatic talk meaning "Where and when will we strike the enemy, and how are we going to keep Eleanor out of the cross fire?"

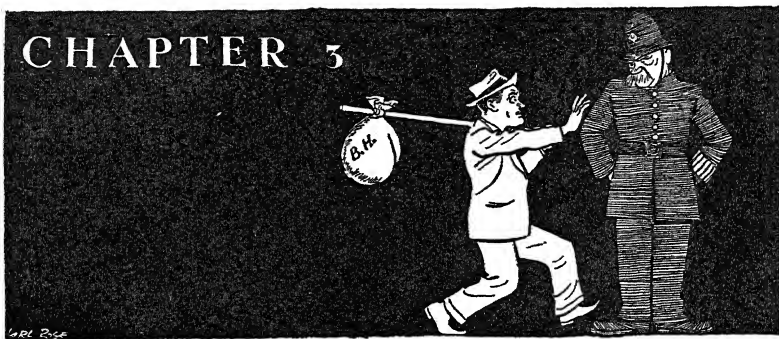
We hadn't been at our hotel more than a couple of hours when the telephone started ringing. It was like being in Hollywood. I hadn't left home. And it's not only in England. Every place I went I met people from show business either entertaining or fighting.

I understand that from a journalistic standpoint one of the grimmest features of this war is the possibility that H. V. Kaltenborn will be scooped by Louella Parsons.



Speaking of WRENS....

CHAPTER 5



Britain Waves the Rules

WHEN we arrived in London we stepped off the train into the biggest crowd of people you ever saw, all taking pictures and hollering at us. They hollered things like "Mind the truck, sir," "Move it over please, sir," "'Eads up, sir."

I heard more "sirs" from baggage-smashers than you'd hear from a pfc trying to talk his C.O. into a furlough.

Everybody was very polite and spoke with a British accent, which reminded me a little of doing a United Nations benefit at the Hollywood Bowl, except that there only the American actors speak with a British accent.

We were taken in tow immediately by Bill Dover, head of the U.S.O. in England. I had known Bill when he was with the Hollywood Victory Committee. Before that, he was one of Darryl Zanuck's right-hand men, but of course I didn't know him then. I never even got to know one of Zanuck's left-hand men.

It was Bill who made our stay in England successful. I mean from our point of view. The Britishers were always too polite to say what they thought of us. Maybe Bill saw to that, too.

He saw to everything else—our accommodations, transpor-

tation, rations, wardrobe. He even took care of our laundry problems. If you think we have a laundry situation over here, you should see what goes with the laundry over there. You can't call your underwear your own—because you are ashamed to. But Bill took care of ours, although once or twice he forgot to starch the lace on my shorts.

Bill sneaked us out of that crowd at the station into a taxicab and off to Claridge's. I don't know how he managed it, because I kept slipping away from him, ducking back into the crowds trying to get them to accept my autograph.

We got our first real idea of how London had been "it" in the blitz as we drove to the hotel. But like Bristol, and all the other British cities we saw later, life was going on as if there were no scars. The people were pretending there was nothing wrong with their city—the way you treat a friend who has some bad facial disfigurement.

Of course, when we got to Claridge's, nothing was in any way different from the last time I had seen it four years—and it might have been four thousand years—ago. The service was still perfect. What they had to serve was very limited. But they were proud of those limitations, and with plenty of reason. They wore their shortages like badges of honor and observed the rules of rationing with at least as much care as they obeyed the Ten Commandments. We didn't know this when we were shown to our rooms that Friday evening. We had had a long trip, so I thought even though it was only Friday I'd take a bath. You know how it is when you are away from home—anything goes.

I phoned room service and said there wasn't any soap in the bathroom.

"Sorry, sir," room service said, "there is no soap in the King's bathroom either."

"The King's bathing habits are none of my business. Send up some soap."

"It will do no good to get nasty, sir."

"I am going to get very nasty if I don't get some soap to take a bath."

"It would not be noticeable on you, sir."

"I should have brought some with me from America."



What they had to serve was very limited.

"Yes, sir. And I suggest you go back and fetch some, sir."

It was like talking to a combination of Arthur Treacher and Allan Mowbray, except for the fact that they would have given me some soap.

I began slowly to get the idea that soap was a great luxury here in one of the finest hotels in the world. I began to get a little idea about what going without really meant to the British. You learn how to take care of a cake of soap. You carry it around with you and watch it melt away with increasing worry. It's a little like a dwindling annuity. The

one dirty look I got the whole time I was in England was because I wasn't careful of my soap. I got rid of this dirty look when I got a new cake in Algiers. After my no-soap talk with the management, I called Bill Dover. He fixed it. They opened the safe so that I could clean up. They even let the soap be sent all the way up to my bathroom. The manager himself brought it, lathered up, counted off six bubbles, and took it back.

When I finished the bath I was hungry, so I called room service again. And again I found that you don't tell them what you want. You ask them what they have. And whatever it happens to be, it is brought to you and served as elegantly as they used to serve pressed duck or breast of guinea hen under glass.

A waiter will raise a great silver bell from a platter on which stands a tomato surprise. That's one tomato. In London, that's a surprise.

They don't beef about this kind of scarceness in England. The only thing that gets them really sore is when someone cheats the rationing system—the cheaters are looked upon with about the same degree of friendliness as horse thieves were around Carson City in 1895.

Bill Dover had dinner with us and left early when we decided to get some sleep. But right after Bill left Romano said, "I wonder what it's like to walk around in a complete blackout."

"I have heard interesting things happen to guys," said Pepper.

"Like what?" Tony asked.

"Well, you might bump into some new friends."

We went down in the lift. (I call the elevator "the lift" because I understand there is an old law saying any American who goes to England and doesn't come back calling the elevator "the lift" may have a subversive streak in his nature, and bears watching; I don't want any more trouble with the

F.B.I., G2, or Scotland Yard.) It really was black out. By comparison our dimmed-out big cities were about as dim as the pitcher's box at a night baseball game. At first you grope around pretty badly. You really can't see a thing. I reached my hand out once and got slapped twice. But then you begin to see a little bit better. In the next five minutes I reached my hand out once and got slapped only once.

The taxis are scarce, which is fine. When you're with a girl you don't have to think of an excuse for walking. You really prefer to walk anyway, until you get used to the way those cabs drive around completely unlighted streets with just the faintest kind of pinprick lights to show they're there.

I hadn't gone far when I felt a hand squeeze my arm. I was pretty thrilled. I whispered, "Lonesome, honey?"



I whispered, "Lonesome, honey?"

And Romano said, "Oh, it's you!"

We walked arm in arm after that, so I wouldn't get any more false hopes. All of a sudden we sort of surrounded somebody, the way three people walking arm in arm will do when they collide with someone coming the other way. We started to apologize and say how sorry we were. All the man

said was, "I thought you guys were going to get some sleep." It was Bill Dover. I can't get people to believe this story. I can't even get them to listen to it. But it's the truth.

That was our first evening in London. The next day things began happening. We started work. But first we found that all the shots they had given us—the ones that made me feel like a dart board—weren't over. Before the British got through with us we represented more needlework than a petit-point chair seat. After all those shots I figure that if I get so much as a hangnail in the next five years it will make a complete bum out of the entire British and American medical profession.

There were a lot of other formalities, too. We had to get our A.P.O.s from the Army, to make sure all those department store ads could reach me without too much delay. Every few days I'd find a beautifully printed little folder saying, "Buy War Bonds! War Bonds Are Your First Gift! But If Your Wife Really Needs a Mink Coat . . ." etc. Judging from that stuff, I got the idea that what the country needed was a good twenty-five-hundred-dollar mink war bond.

On the way to get our A.P.O. numbers we passed a British soldier standing by a winch that had a cable running up into the fog overhead.

"Is there a barrage balloon on the other end of that cable?" I asked him.

"If there ain't, guv'ner," he said, "I'm doing the blooming rope trick."

Then they fingerprinted us again. The things you have to do to get back into vaudeville! Then Bill Dover turned us over to Captain Eddie Dowling, who used to be stage manager for the Shuberts and is now an Army Special Service officer whose job it is to handle traveling troupes like ours. He had newsreels made of us. I asked him what they did with them, and Eddie said, "They are rushed out to various U. S.

Army installations all over Britain, where they are shown to let the men know you are in the neighborhood."

"Gee, that's great!" I said.

"Well," he said, "in the Army we believe a man can stand a shock better if he is prepared for it."

The morning was topped off by a little press conference. They sat me at one end of a long table, and all the representatives of the British press started firing questions at me. It wasn't always easy to answer, especially for me. F. D. R. has never called to urge me to take an important diplomatic post. I was worried. If I picked a nice parlay of three or four out-of-line cracks to hand to the whole British press, the American Embassy might suggest I get lost. What are you going to say, for instance, to a reporter who asks, "Do you think we look shabby?"

If I answered, "Yes," which wasn't exactly the truth, I was being rude. If I said, "No," which also wasn't exactly the truth, I was being patronizing. I think I told them I thought they looked "wonderful." I like that word. I think it's wonderful.

Of course you know that clothes over there are rationed too. They use the point system. It's a lot different than the point system that's being used over here. I mean where a gal takes a guy walking along Fifth Avenue and points to a dress in a window.

Believe me, ladies, those English gals are sensational. Next time you buy a hat "to keep up your morale," remember that most of them are wearing cotton stockings. A pair of those rayons you fuss about would look to an English gal the way the black silk tights Ann Pennington used to wear in the *Ziegfeld Follies* looked to me when I was a boy. What do I mean, "When I was a boy"? They'd still look good to me.

Saturday afternoon I ducked everything and went down to Hitchin to see my grandfather. The last time I'd seen him

was in 1939, when we had had a big family celebration to celebrate his ninety-sixth birthday.

It was nice just to ride along and enjoy the English countryside. It hadn't changed much. There just seemed to be a little more of it. England's land had always been under intense cultivation. Now it seemed more intense. Even the golf courses had either been plowed up or covered with barbed wire and other obstacles to prevent a plane from landing. The British didn't have time for golf.

The forty miles to Hitchin went pretty fast. I wondered how the old man would look—almost a hundred—and remembered how spry he'd been four years before.

At that ninety-sixth birthday party of his a terrible thing had happened to me. After dinner the family sort of turned to me with that "Well, you're-a-big-comedian-go-ahead-and-be-funny" look. I got up and started to let my family hear the stuff that had paid for my trip—first-class plus—to England. It was the same act that had gone great in all the big houses in all the key cities. I laid an egg so big they couldn't get it out of the room.

Luckily, there was a second cousin there who did bird calls and tancy whistling. He had a bird ready, jumped up, began to whistle, and saved the party. Then Granddad and I did a small dance together, after which he turned to me and said, "You sit down. You're not as young as you used to be. I'll take it from here."

I think show business lost a great performer when Granddad got himself apprenticed to a stonemason back around 1860. He was still active in his contracting business until 1939.

When I got to Hitchin this time I spent about three hours with Gramp talking over family matters, telling him about myself and what I had been doing. I was sorry I wasn't able to tell him more about the children. I'd been traveling around the country so much that when I came home it was

just like doing another personal appearance, only with meals.

By way of explanation I told him that the day I left for the East to start for England I called good-by to the children.



"You sit down. You're not as young as you used to be."

who were playing with the dogs, and my daughter Linda looked up, waved, and said, "Good-by, Bob Hopel" That's nice billing, but I'd rather be called Daddy.

Back in London that evening Tony, Jack, Frances, and I went to see Flanagan and Allen in a grand musical show called *Hi Diddle Diddle*. We had a fine time, but it's no cinch to get it through your head that you can understand the language and still not understand its jokes. Those British performers do a type of gag that's entirely different from mine. People laugh at theirs. All around us they were dying

at gags that left us miles down the road. And all of a sudden, while we were laughing on cue every time the audience did, we heard Flanagan say, "Who do you think we have with us this evening?"

I looked around to see if maybe it was Churchill or Eden. It turned out to be me. Next thing I knew I was up on the stage. In fact, our whole gang was up on the stage, and we did a fast ten minutes. Frances, Tony, and Jack each did a number, and I told them we'd had an uneventful trip, just stopping in Nova Scotia for a drink and flying the rest of the way blind.

The theaters in London, too, are having great seasons. But because of the blackout, and because everyone works hard and gets up early, they play sort of twilight shows. These start around six and finish between eight thirty and nine o'clock.

After theater I met Major Cy Bartlett and Colonel Jimmie Wallace of the Eighth Air Force at the Embassy Club, which is about like El Morocco or the Stork Club in New York. Cy Bartlett used to be a picture writer in Hollywood. He wrote a picture called *The Road to Zanzibar*. That really started a cycle, especially in England. Whenever we came on the screen, the audience rushed out and started to cycle.

The place was packed, mostly with people I knew, thought I knew, or wanted to know. Cy introduced me to John Steinbeck, who was covering the war for a newspaper syndicate. I admire his work so much that I did everything I knew how to do to be friendly. But I think he would rather have danced with a girl. We had a couple of drinks with Captain Burgess Meredith, who's also with the Eighth Air Force. Last time I had seen him was on the Paramount lot in Hollywood. I still didn't feel as if I'd left home, except for the hotel bill.

Major Ben Lyon and Bebe Daniels were also there, and we arranged to do a broadcast together. Then more Hollywood people—Ann Dvorak and Leslie Fenton. Leslie was

working at the War Ministry and Ann was doing U.S.O. Camp shows.

When Captain Gene Raymond walked in, I began to realize that I really hadn't left home and that I was going to continue to run into friends wherever I went. It gives you a sort of preview of what the peacetime world is going to be like. Everyone is going to have friends all over the world, just as we have them all over the country today.

There is, of course, a great shadow cast over the bright spots of London night life. In our party, for instance, there was a girl named Gertrude Dahl, who worked in the Air Ministry. She had known my wife, so I looked her up when I got to London. She told me about going with a party of twelve people to the Casino de Paris one evening. There was an air raid, and the concussion from a near miss caused a cave-in. Only two of that party of twelve left the building alive. About two hundred people there were killed.

And you see things like a kid I saw at the Embassy seated all by himself at a table for two, with his feet cocked up on the extra chair. I have seen guys in New York or Hollywood night spots sitting moodily carrying the torch, but this youngster was a lot different. He was an RAF pilot, and he had a beautiful sizz on. I watched him for a long time. All he did was sit and look at a picture of another RAF pilot. He was talking to himself. From his mumbling I gathered he had gone all through training with the other boy. He had been side by side with him through every phase of the air battle of Britain. He had eaten with him, drunk with him, flown with him, borrowed money from him, and just two days ago he had seen him go down right in front of his own plane.

"Blew up! Blew up right in front of me," he kept saying. "And I couldn't do anything about it."

The RAF boys are as rugged as they come, and when they let themselves go like that it's a rare exception.

As far as I was concerned that ended my first evening of night clubbing in England.

CHAPTER 4



We Play Hamlets

THE Army figured out for me that in eleven days we covered 1,306 miles, or 5,982 Burma Shave signs. This was just going from one American installation to another by motor. Our cars were 1938 English-built Hudsons and Fords driven by members of an English Women's Corps similar to our AWVS. That was a fine treat for me, the guy who'd been making fun of women drivers all his life.

But the gals who drove us were okay. That's because it's different in England. It's much easier and more natural for a woman to be a good driver over there. In England you're *supposed* to drive on the left side of the street.

And these gals knew what they were supposed to do. They drove like men—which they would consider an insult. One of them, Zena Groves, had a husband who was a major in the British Army in the Middle East. Eve Luff was a tall, handsome English girl—you know the type—they won't have anything to do with me. Marie Stewart was the same type, only she was more of an ingénue. I won their confidence, though, by giving them each a pair of Nylon stockings. What I mean is, I gave them each one stocking and said, "If you drive real carefully you can have the other."

In those eleven days of careful driving I found out it was

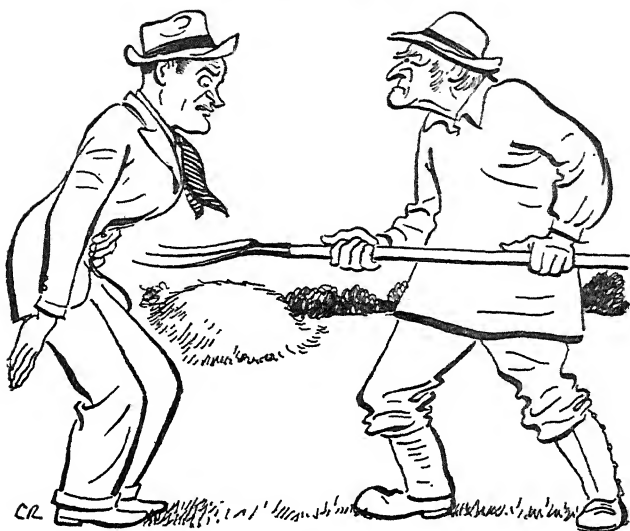
best not to care too much where you'd been, where you were, or where you were going. In that way you didn't have to worry about giving away any military secrets. The British, under the threat of invasion, learned how to clam-up about places, place names, and locations of things. Even the movements of Big Ben were a military secret. So driving through the counties was a little like driving around a strange city in a taxicab. You always had the feeling you were going in circles, the only difference being that in a taxicab in a strange city you always are.

There weren't any roadside signs to help us. They took those down when they had the invasion jitters. Trying to find your way around got you as confused as a centipede trying to find out which knee had water on it. It was like breaking sticks to get lost. The population doesn't help you much, either. They want you to get lost. And stay lost. To them everybody on the road they don't know is a probable Nazi spy.

Every time I asked a rural Englishman how to get anywhere he gave me the Rudolf Hess treatment. That's sort of an X-ray evil eye. Then they give out with a lot of double talk while waiting for swastikas to drop out of your sleeves.

This "I'm-a-stranger-in-town-myself" routine reminded me of a story I used to tell in vaudeville. Vaudeville—that's a variety show for civilians. So I fixed it up to tell to the troops. Just another one of the horrors of global war. I used to say, "I asked a little boy which road to take to get here." The kid shrugged and said, "I don't know." I said to him, "Is it far from here?" He just answered, "I don't know." That's all I could get out of this kid. Finally, I thought I'd find out if he knew any other English, and I asked him his name. He said, "I don't know." I got mad. I said, "You don't know much, do you?" The kid said, "*I'm* not lost." You'd be surprised how many people haven't heard that gag.

And it isn't only the rural Englishmen who have this great respect for military secrets. You can walk up to any usher in a



Every time I asked a rural Englishman how to get anywhere he gave me the Rudolf Hess treatment.

theater or any bellboy in any hotel and say, "Where's the gentlemen's room?" He'll just smile politely and answer, "Loose talk helps the enemy." Of course that doesn't help you much.

The first show we did in England was at an Army Air Force base that I'm going to call Sharpington for reasons just noted. But the guys who saw us there will know where I mean. We made our headquarters there while we played a lot of fields in the neighborhood. The commanding officer was one of the most terrific guys I've ever met. His name was Colonel Bertolero.

He used to run a chain of movie houses in the Dakotas. To someone who's run a chain of movie houses, war must seem like a ten-day vacation with pay. He'll probably only give a soldier a pass if he promises to put a "now playing" sign in his window. But he was truly a wonderful man. He'd played some of my pictures and still spoke to me. I'd tell you some

of the things he said, but children may get their hands on this.

It turned out he had been an air officer in the last war. Naturally, that made him considerably older than most of the officers in his command. And believe me those kids had their C.O. right where *he* wanted them. They really rode the old Colonel. Or so they thought. They kept kidding him about his military career and asking him to tell them how he won the last war. It didn't sound very military to me, so I asked the Colonel what played with his junior officers needling their C.O. He just smiled and said, "I want them to have a little fun. I don't care how they have it."

As we got around among the Air Force men who had seen action and sent men into action, we began to see more and more of this attitude and to understand that rank meant what the men thought of you, not what was on your shoulders.

The first show we did was the way it used to be when you opened a musical in New Haven. You were feeling everything out. You kept your guard up. You threw every line at the audience carefully, because they might throw something back at you.

But this feeling didn't last long. We soon discovered you had to be pretty lousy to flop in front of those guys. They were so glad to see somebody from home that they yelled and screamed and whistled at everything. And for a little while, they were able to forget completely their own problems and what they'd been through, or what they might be expecting to go through.

The second show we did (we tried to get in four or five every day) was at a big bomber base for a bunch of the boys who push plenty of those Flying Forts out over Germany.

After we finished the show we learned they were getting ready to leave almost immediately on a mission. They took us through one of the ships. She was called "The Delta Raider" and had been on twelve missions. She was all bombed up. The guns were all loaded. The motors were warming up.

Everything was ready. I could feel the tenseness in the air. But the whole crew was smiling and seemed unusually gay.

I commented on this and asked one of the guys if he wasn't excited or nervous. He said, "Naw, we're all just happy because you're here."

A crack like that can pay a man off for anything he might ever have to go through to entertain soldiers. These men were actually going out into sky so full of flak that the automatic pilot bails out. And all they wanted to do before they started was get our autographs. I felt like telling them that they should be giving us theirs. But they don't want that kind of stuff. Pretty soon their enthusiasm began to get me.

I told one of the guys I'd like to go on the mission with him. Frances said, "Why don't you, Bob?"

I said, "Good idea."

Then the radio operator spoke up. "Sure," he said. "Go ahead. You can take my place."

But they wouldn't let me. It turned out the radio in the plane didn't have push-button tuning, which is the only kind of radio I can operate.

The bomber crews went for their final briefing before taking off for across the Channel, and we climbed into our cars and started out to give a couple more shows. One was at another bomber base, and one was for a camp full of Negro engineers. Those were the first Negro troops I had a chance to see. As the trip progressed, we saw a great many more, doing every kind of hard job an army can dish out, from peeling spuds to flying fighter planes (and don't think that Ninety-ninth Pursuit Squadron isn't on the first team).

I opened with a gag I sometimes used to close with—a story about a crap game. I started right out saying, "You men know what a barracks is . . . it's a crap game with bunks. Well, a crap game was going on among a group of boys, one of whom protected himself against luck by having three dice—one up his sleeve—in case of emergency.

"So, this boy rolled 'em out saying, 'Dice, do something!' And they did. The third one rolled out on the floor with the other two. And there, staring this boy in the face, were three sixes . . . three great big, healthy, athletic boxcars.

"The other boys in the game started reaching for knives and razors and various pieces of cutlery. But the boy who'd rolled the three sixes took it all in calmly, picked up the three dice, and said, 'Gentlemen, looks like my point's eighteen.' "

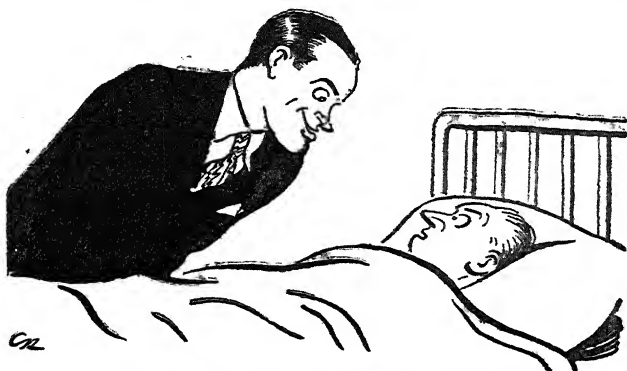
After our third show that day we all went out to the baseball diamond, and Frances and I played a little soft-ball with the men. They brought out special duds for us to wear. The Sergeant looked at Frances, then looked at me, then said, "Who gets the bloomers?"

That Sergeant was a great guy. He showed us his wife's picture. They'd been married just before he sailed for England. He looked at her picture lovingly and said, "Bob, she's wonderful. I'll never forget our honeymoon. The finest honeymoon a couple ever had on a six-hour pass."

The last show of the day was at a large hospital. Those are the spots where you really have to act. We generally handled hospitals by putting on an outside show for everybody who could make it. This sometimes ran as high as a thousand people, sometimes as low as two hundred. Then we'd go through the wards for the kids who couldn't get out and put on an eight- or ten-minute show, sing a few songs and talk to the guys about home or anything they wanted to talk about. Sometimes I'd start things off by coming up to some kid in bed and saying, "Did you see our show or were you sick before?"

We were going through the wards at this first hospital; Frances and Tony had done a couple of songs, and I started doing a soft-shoe dance up and down the aisle between the beds. You know how glossy they keep those hospital floors. Well, I made a fast turn and crashed before I could hit the silk. I thought I'd broken my wrist. I still think I did. But

the X rays didn't show a thing. I think the whole sneaky thing was arranged by Fibber McGee and his Glo-Coat.



"Did you see our show or were you sick before?"

But I'll never forget how I felt when I landed and thought my wrist was broken. I figured I might have to have my hand in a cast but that I'd probably get the Purple Heart. The wrist hurt for over five weeks, and all I could do about it, to get sympathy, was to limp.

We were on our way back to Sharpington when we heard the terrific noise of four-motored planes overhead. There were forty-two Fortresses on their way back from a mission. It was the first time we'd seen such a big formation, and we figured maybe some of them were returning to the bomber base we'd played just before they started out. So we dashed back to that base as fast as we could, rushed to the officers' club, and I asked, "Where do they go first?"

A young lieutenant offered to take us over to the place they'd be interrogated.

We climbed into a jeep and got there ahead of the crew. The planes were coming in one after the other, kicking up clouds of dust and filling the whole countryside with the powerful vibrations of victory.

Pretty soon trucks and jeeps full of fliers began rolling in.

The men were excited and deliriously happy. When they saw us they began to cry and laugh and holler. They grabbed Frances and hugged her and kissed her. "You brought us luck!" they kept screaming. "You brought us luck!"

Show you how brave those guys are . . . they even hugged me!

"How was it?" we asked.

"A milk run!" a kid grinned. "Eighteen went out and eighteen came back!"

This made *us* feel great, too. Suddenly we realized that all day long each of us had been thinking about those guys. We hadn't said anything to each other about it, just worried quietly. I said, "We've been thinking about you guys all afternoon and sort of sweating you in."

One kid in the back of the room hollered, "*You've* been sweating us in!"

As I write this I realize you're probably not going to read it the way he said it. But that kid put more of both gratitude and sarcasm into one line than any actor has ever put into any line ever written.

I soon found out that eighteen bombers on a round trip was unusual. When Colonel Bertolero was in the States recently, he told me of one mission on which twenty-one bombers from one base went out and only one came limping home. That's pretty grim.

But on the other side of the ledger, there's the constant reminder that those planes' failure to return doesn't necessarily mean we might not see some of those fliers again. Here's a letter I received some time after I got home.

Dear Mr. Hope:

Under separate cover I am sending you a picture taken when you were entertaining the men of the 8th Air Force, in England. . . . The picture came into my hands through coincidence. It was sent to a girl by her fiancé, a photographer with

the 8th Air Force, and a mutual friend thought she recognized my husband in the crowd. I had the picture copied and enlarged and feel sure that the man standing near the center of the picture with the insignia on his flight jacket is my husband and the man at his right is his copilot. That is, if the picture was taken before May 19th. On that day my husband and his crew were forced to bail out on a raid over Kiel. Fortunately he came down without injury and is now in the Stalag Luft #3. On December 5th his Air Medal with Three Oak Leaf Clusters and the Distinguished Flying Cross were pinned on my inadequate chest. Of course I'm proud of him and very grateful to you for that grin of enjoyment on his face . . . even if it's just someone who looks like him in a not too good photo, I'm still grateful for that grin. Sincerely, Dorothy Clark.

I'm grateful for the letter, Mrs. Clark.

The happy return of eighteen bombers was a fitting ending to our first day of shows in England. We'd found out that American boys were so hungry for familiar names and faces, even if it was only my face, that it was almost impossible not to please them. The truth of what Adolphe Menjou had told us that morning was obvious. As we were leaving Claridge's we'd met Dolph. "How you people doing?" I asked him.

"Killing 'em!" said Dolph modestly. "Blood running down the aisles. Bob, we've got a unit that leaves them limp." He was doing so well I was sorry I asked him.

We made our headquarters for two days with Colonel Bertolero. And both the officers and men were just great to us. We got the best food the cook could concoct out of available rations. And we also got all the delicacies Yankee ingenuity could arrange for. I use the word "ingenuity" loosely. It means things you can do with Spam.

The third morning for breakfast, though, we thought we'd been working too hard. We thought maybe one of the casual-

ties had brought his favorite mirage back from the African desert and it had escaped. On our plates were ham and eggs. They weren't the usual G.I. scrambled ones made from egg powder. They were real fried eggs, sunny side up. The kind any hen would be proud to walk away from. You know how nice they look up at you in the morning at home? Well, one of these winked at me. I can't imagine where the cook got the ham. It looked a little as if we'd played a split week together in Akron. Then another idea worried me. And I stayed worried till I actually saw Menjou in London that week end. As a matter of fact, the treat was a special arrangement made by Captain Clarence G. Kinsey, billed by Colonel Bertolero as "the best PX officer in England."

As we moved from air base to air base we began to watch the planes in the sky with more understanding, and I thought of my first plane trip and how scared I was. The trip was from Salt Lake City to Los Angeles, over the mountains. I don't know whether anybody else noticed my goose-pimples, but an eagle followed the plane for three miles screaming, "If I can catch 'em, I can hatch 'em."

Pretty soon Tony, Jack, Frances, and I got so we could identify the different types of ships flying over England. And we knew, when we saw sixteen or eighteen big ones moving in a formation, that they were probably just an element from one field going out to join the hundreds of other elements of similar size, perhaps over the Channel or the North Sea, where those five-hundred and thousand-plane raids rendezvous. It reminded me of when I was a kid and watched the parade form in all the side streets, then fall in behind the grand marshal.

The third day we ran into an old friend we'd met in the States, Lieutenant General Monk Hunter, who was then head of the Fighter Command at a field I won't bother to identify. At this writing he's C.O. of Mitchel Field on Long Island.

I'd first met General Hunter at Consolidated Aircraft Corporation. It was just after Pearl Harbor. We were on our way to do a show at a naval base and were being shown through Consolidated by one of the vice-presidents. General Hunter was there because he was then with Air Intelligence.

If you've seen any pictures of General Hunter you'll remember he's the guy with the stash like Colonna's.



General Hunter's the guy with the stash like Colonna's.

The men from Consolidated introduced Frances and me to the General, but Colonna had lagged behind for some reason—probably a girl riveter—so he didn't get introduced. We were talking to the General when Jerry came bouncing in, stopped dead in his tracks, did a double-take, pointed at the General and screamed, "Impostor!"

When we played General Hunter's base in England, the first thing he asked us was, "Where's the impostor? Where's the brush-head?"

The guys in Hunter's command were the fighter boys who flew the P-47 Thunderbolts. Youngsters full of that same kind of bang that made the RAF kids in their Spitfires able to stand off the best the *Luftwaffe* had to offer and save England when there was nobody else to help them with the job.

We played several of these Fighter Command fields in one day. At one spot we did a show inside a big, gloomy hangar. It wasn't clicking. The laughs were slow and spotty. Sure-fire stuff lay there so long it got moldy. About halfway through,

I told Lieutenant Goddu, our Special Service officer, that I didn't like to play inside a hangar. The light was bad, they couldn't see my kisser, there was an echo . . . I could have gone on forever making excuses for the omelet we were laying. But Goddu stopped me by saying that the guys felt kind of low. They'd lost their commanding officer the day before. Then we really went to work on that bunch and tried to pull them out of their funk.

It wasn't easy. While Tony was on, one of the pilots took me over to another hangar and showed me a couple of Thunderbolts with 20-mm. shell holes in them. One hole was right under the pilot's seat. Those holes are about as big around as your arm, and men die from them.

While Frances was singing Jack Pepper and I cooked up a little routine. I came on and said to Jack, "I hope you appreciate the audience we have here."

He said, "I appreciate them, but they haven't been appreciating us very much."

"Jack, please! These guys rise above us. They rise above everything, they're the highest-flying guys in the whole creation. These are the men who pilot the P-47 Thunderbolts. They go faster than anything in the world."

"Oh no, Bob, the English pound goes faster."

"Yeah, I guess you're right," I said. "But even a pound doesn't move as fast as a private in London on a three-hour pass."

This seemed to help break the tension. Most of those guys were veterans of the Old Eagle Squadron of the RAF with wings on both sides of their tunics. Every time I saw them around London I felt like saluting them. And that Lieutenant Goddu rated a salute, too. He won his Purple Heart with Terry Allen's First Division in North Africa.

Every week end we'd cut back to town to rest up for a few hours. Cross out those words "to rest up." We just went back to town.

We'd check in about one or two o'clock in the morning, and naturally we'd want to sit around and talk things over. We were like a bunch of Miss Spence's girls having a fudge party.

Dolph used to drop in, and sometimes Hank Ladd, who was also heading a U.S.O. unit that was knocking around England. Pretty soon Tony'd get out his guitar, Frances would be singing, Jack and I would do a little dancing, and the manager would show up.

He was awfully nice about it. He'd say, "Gentlemen, really! After all, you know this is a different kind of hotel."

The first Sunday we came back to London to rest was the Fourth of July. So we rested by whipping down to a spot about forty-five minutes from town and did a big thing at the Empire Theatre for the Eighth Air Force headquarters personnel.

It was kind of nice to get into a properly equipped theater for a change. Mostly we rigged up our P.A. system and did our stuff out of doors from an impromptu platform or the back of a truck. The Army liked it better this way. For reasons of security, the military didn't want any gatherings indoors to be too large in case of trouble. That was okay with us. We also figured that with the show out of doors it would be easier to get away, in case they started toward us.

To give you a picture of how we operated, a light truck preceded us to every camp we played. This carried all our sound equipment and reached our destination about twenty minutes ahead of us. The two men who ran the truck set up the P.A. system and got everything ready so that when we arrived all we had to do was shake hands with the commanding officer, thank him for the use of whatever he gave us to use, and start using it.

Early in the morning of the fifth of July we started out again, and this time the U.S.O. billeted us with two of the nicest people I've ever met in my life.

CHAPTER 5



Everything Was Just Great, Britain

IN AMERICA if you're forced to spend the night in a small town, you have the choice of a Motel, where you can get a rate if you sign a special long-term twenty-four-hour lease, or the Commercial House, where you can't stand still for a minute without some guy asking you what line you carry. You can get more privacy at a Motel. But the Commercial House sometimes has a pool table. It's not bad, either, if you don't mind sleeping with your head in the side pocket. Neither spot is ever going to knock you out with its room service. But both have plenty of modern plumbing.

That's the first thing you miss in most of the rural inns in England. But after all, there's more to life than plumbing, unless you happen to be a plumber. And the feeling of great age that you get from most of the rural British hotels never fails to impress you. This feeling of great age is caused by stiffness, which is brought on by climbing into those high beds.

The old furniture that never impressed you much at home or in an antique store—except when someone told you the price of it—gives solid reassurances that there'll always be an England. And sleeping in a canopied bed makes you look like a great big fool.

No kidding, every time I stay in one of those grand old English inns I expect Shakespeare to bring up the towels.

We stopped at plenty of these places during our five scrambled weeks in England. But not one of them topped a spot where the U.S.O. billeted us the second week. It was a pri-



Every time I stay in one of those grand old English inns I expect Shakespeare to bring up the towels.

vate home. The family's name was Kilby. Bill and Phil, for Phyllis, Kilby. We just moved in on them, and after I got over feeling like Sheridan Whiteside, I really loved it.

The Kilbys had only two rooms, so they could take in only

Frances and me. I slept in their son's room. Tony and Jack were billeted with a lady next door. The Kilbys used to wait up for us every night with a glass of milk and a bite to eat.

I don't now how the U.S.O. got in touch with people like the Kilbys. I suppose they just registered their name with some sort of housing commission, and we happened to be lucky. Bill Dover told me that when they were asked if they'd put up part of the Bob Hope troupe they acted as if it would be a great honor. That's what I like about the English. They never let you know their true feelings.

We were so grateful to the Kilbys for everything they did for us that we kept trying to please them, the way kids do, by giving them something they didn't want. You know how a kid will try to show his love for you by giving you his pet toad.

We kept insisting the Kilbys let us take them up in a bomber. Finally they consented. It was the first time either of them had been off the ground, and we buzzed their house a couple of times. We certainly reciprocated the hard way—for them.

The most wonderful thing of all about the Kilbys was their consideration of our comfort. Right after we'd moved in and I'd hung my yo-yo over the foot of the bed and gone down for tea, Phil Kilby asked, "Do you want anybody to know where you are?"

I said, "I don't think the finance company would follow me this far, but no! We'd rather rest."

So nobody at all bothered us. But later they bothered the Kilbys. Bill wrote us that after we'd left and neighbors began finding out the Kilbys hadn't asked them in for "an evening" to meet us, they were in a mood to throw stones through the Kilbys' windows. I think it's awful for people to take that attitude just because the Kilbys were nice to us.

Nice? They were sensational! And if they ever come anywhere near any place I'm living, I'll expect them to stay with me . . . and I'll make the price right, too.

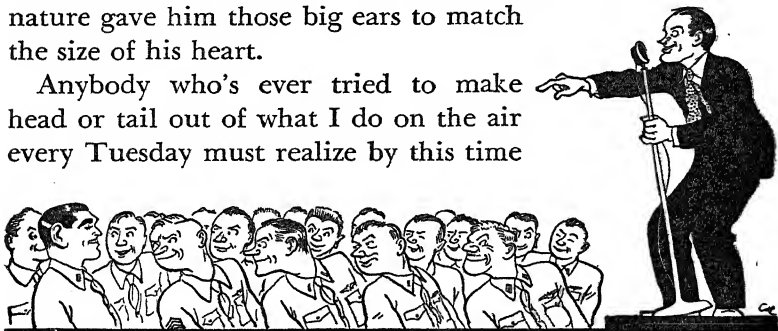
Using the Kilbys' as headquarters, we dragged our headquarters all over the countryside to bomber bases, fighter bases, and hospitals. The same day we checked in at the Kilbys' we found ourselves at the bomber base where Major Clark Gable was stationed.

Clark had ridden the Forts and seen plenty of ack-action as gunner and photographer on many a mission over France and Germany, and the guys at the base loved him. He was also quietly worshiped from afar by the gals who were driving our cars. Afar was the only spot they could worship him from. Clark had made up his mind to divorce himself entirely from show business. He was in the Army. Even when we did the show, he wouldn't come down front with some of the other officers—sat way back with the men. That could be another reason why the men love him.

I opened the show at that base by saying I'd heard they had another leading man permanently stationed with them but that he worked differently than I did. I used my nose to get laughs. He used his ears.

Then I told them it wasn't true that Gable had been forbidden to ride in the B-17s because his ears destroyed the streamlining—they'd fitted the leading edge of them with de-icers. The things you'll say without thinking. As if Gable needed de-icers. Clark took all this kidding just great. I guess nature gave him those big ears to match the size of his heart.

Anybody who's ever tried to make head or tail out of what I do on the air every Tuesday must realize by this time



I opened the show by saying I'd heard they had another leading man stationed with them.

what a job I'm having trying to keep all this stuff in some sort of order. If I were Richard Halliburton I'd have kept a nice diary and be able to tell you exactly what the navigator on the Clipper said to me when I asked him why they called those things Mae Wests. There really wasn't time to keep much of a record of the trip. When I wasn't doping out new material or trying to write a broadcast or see a few people, I spent my time swallowing vitamin pills.

So I say I think it was at a hospital near where Gable was stationed that Colonel John Davis was commanding officer. Again it was old home week.

I'd met Dr. John Davis on the Paramount lot because he was the personal physician of Y. Frank Freeman, President of Paramount Pictures. Our meeting was quite a coincidence. Freeman and I were coming from a projection room where they'd screened my latest picture. Dr. Davis came rushing up to Freeman and said, "I heard you were screening the new Hope picture, so I came right over."

"Thanks," said Frank. "Have you met Hope?"

"Pleased to meet you," I said.

"Nice meeting you, too," said Davis. "You know, Bob, Frank has the strangest sort of sinking spells after every one of your pictures."

"What do you do about it?" I asked.

"Oh, nothing much," he said, "just prescribe a larger dose of Crosby."

There he was in England, commanding a base hospital. What it looked like, I'll never be able to remember. All the hospitals became sort of blended into one long row of beds. Only a few cases stood out. I mean, after doing thirty or so hospitals in five weeks, besides about a hundred and twenty-one different installations, mostly Air Force, everything begins to look alike to you. That's why I prefer a chorus of eight girls to those great big choruses where you're too overwhelmed to concentrate on something particularly interesting.

We had about the same routine in each hospital. The big part of the time was spent talking to the guys. Every time one spoke to me I was proud. We tried to stop at each bed. It didn't matter much what you said to the kids. You just tried to make some personal conversation with them. I'd ask where they were from and then say anything that came into my head about their part of the country. I talked to one fellow who pointed to a kid down the ward and said, "See that guy down there? He's going home. He's just completed twenty-five missions."

Twenty-five missions! Can you imagine what it means to be shot at over enemy territory twenty-five different times? Can you imagine the courage it takes each time? If you stop to think how nervous you get trying to make the eighth straight pass, maybe you'll get an idea. That kid made twenty-five straight passes. Every time you come back, you've made your point.

The kid was a sergeant but not the cocky, comedy kind. The guy I was talking to called to him, and he came ambling over. I said, "How are you? Where you from?"

"Arkansas," he drawled.

"I've got a partner in pictures, used to work on the air with a lad from Arkansas," I told him. "Do you know Bob Burns?"

"Comes from my part of the state, up around Figure Five School-house," the kid said. He sure talked like Burns.

Just to keep the conversation going a little longer, I added, "I'll bet they make you mayor of your town when you get back home. Don't they give you anything for completing twenty-five missions?"

The guy in the bed grabbed my arm, pulled me down, and whispered, "He's got every award that the Army's thought of so far." All I could do was turn to the sergeant, shake hands, and say, "Glad to know you."

He said he was "mighty proud to have met me." Makes you feel silly.

Sometimes the kids in the ward ask for your autograph. More often they just smile and hold your hand. When Frances came along they always dropped mine. I guess I don't look so well in *my* slacks.

Sometimes a doctor or a nurse would ask us as a special favor to come to some ward and really do a little of the show for some kid who took it hard, not being able to catch the main show. Of course we always went. And a surprising number of times we'd find the kid gone, or just on his way back on a stretcher carried by some walking cases. He'd holler, "Hey, doc, I made it. I saw the show!"

That's how those guys in the hospitals are. They'll help each other to the extreme of their ability. They'll fight their way back to health.

At one hospital the doctor took us to see a little Italian kid. He seemed cheerful. "Show Hope where the thing hit you," the doctor said. The kid smiled and pointed to his chest.

"It went in here," he explained. Then, pointing to a spot diagonally southward to the rear of his chest, he said, "It came out here." "It" was a hunk of red-hot flak.

"Nice piece of air conditioning," I said.

He smiled and said, "Yeah! That's where I got it. In the air."

It was perfectly all right with me for him to have the last word. I saw another youngster who was hit by a 20-mm. shell on the side of the head. Popped it right open. Now all he has is a long, thin scar. He was a little punchy, but the doctor told me that would wear off and he'd be in great shape.

Those doctors are doing a grand job. I was told how many thousands of cases they operate on a week and how very, very few—I mean like five or six cases—they lose. But I really didn't get any idea of what went on in hospitals till I hit Africa.

One of the bomber bases we played while living at the

Kilbys' was the base then commanded by General Frank Armstrong. He's one of our great flying fighters. He flew a plane back from a mission once holding his wounded copilot in his arms. That's one-arm driving that counts.

I got this from a G.I. who heard the speech General Armstrong made when he took over the bomber base we played. It had been pretty badly shot up, both physically and as to morale. Eighty-five per cent of their flying personnel had been killed. Armstrong got the replacements together and hit them with this: "Fifty per cent of you fellows might get killed. Forty per cent will never get home again. But you'll have a better chance if you follow me in close formation. I'm going to lead you. I want you to listen to me. We're going to get through. From now on this is a military camp. We're going to live and die in a military manner. If any of you are afraid, you can walk out now." One or two guys walked out. And that takes courage, too.

When we played for them they were acknowledged to be one of the best bombing groups in the whole USAAF.

At lots of the bomber and fighter bases where we did shows we ran into guys we'd met when we were doing our broadcasts around at camps in the States. There was one kid named Frank Strickland. We knew him rather well because he was the pilot who once flew us from Denver, Colorado, to Casper, Wyoming. Casper was then the last training post for B-17 groups. We did three shows in Casper. And we met a lot of the fellows.

So we're standing around a big bomber base in England, and just before our show started one of the crewmen I recognized as having been on the trip to Casper came up to me and said, "Know who's here? Strickland!" But he said it the way I'd say to Churchill, "Know who's here? Stalin!"

So when I got up on the stage I looked all over and finally had to say, "Is Lieutenant Strickland here?"

From way, way back I heard, "Captain, boy!"

Later when we got to talk I asked Frank how it was. "It's pretty rough," he said, "but we're doing all right."

Two weeks later I met the same crewman; rather, he went out of his way to meet me. "How's Strickland?" I asked. "We haven't heard from him in ten days," the kid said, and walked away fast. That was what he'd come to tell me. There wasn't any more to say.

We practically wound up our stay at the Kilbys' by doing a show at some of the bomber bases around Hitchin. That's where my granddad lived, so naturally we went to see him. He got up out of bed to come out and meet me. There he was, glorious in his ninety-nine and three quarters years, in perfect morning attire, wing collar and all. We took him with us to do a show, and he posed for a lot of newspaper pictures. I'm afraid that wasn't the right thing for him to do. But nobody could have prevented it.

We went back to London to rest. Why do I keep saying "to rest"?

The first message I looked at when we got back to Claridge's was a note from Hal Block saying Jack, Tony, Frances, and I had a broadcast scheduled for the following Saturday. Hal Block was the radio gagman the OWI had stationed in England to help guys like me slant our material properly for the English audiences . . . and for the troops who had been stationed in England. They'd all taken on a little different point of view from the one they had when they left home.

Naturally, I got in touch with Hal right away about some new jokes. That's the trouble with being a comedian. You have to worry about material all the time. I kept thinking how lucky that guy Crosby is. Somebody tells him he's scheduled to do a broadcast. He doesn't have to worry about material. He doesn't have to worry about rehearsal. All he has to do when he gets to the studio is find out what key they're playing in.

And when he doesn't even bother to find out the key,

everybody says, "That Crosby! Nobody can do the things to a song that he does!"

If I ever go on the radio again, it'll be as a singer. And if I ever go on as a singer, I'll never go on the radio again.

Block told me the show we were going to do was to be put on up around Bristol and was going all over the world, including the United States. It was *Yankee-Doodle-Do* with Vic Oliver, Leslie Mitchell, and my onetime Hollywood pal Major David Niven of the British Army.

It was nice seeing Major Niven in uniform. It reminded me of a lot of stories he'd told me about the last war. David had always elaborated on the doings of himself and his immediate superior, a hard-drinking professional soldier named Captain Trubshaw, when Niven was a subaltern on Malta. As soon as England declared war Niven headed for home, claiming he was on loan-out from Samuel Goldwyn for the duration.

I think it was that second week end in London that I saw Sidney Field. That's not another air base. Sidney Field is a swell British comedian we saw in a musical comedy called *Strike a New Note*. If Field ever comes over to the States, I think he'll definitely strike a new note. Humor's gotten a whole lot more international already. By the time this war ends, comedians like Jack Benny and Edgar Bergen may be doing routines in Punjabi at Loew's Calcutta.

Of course, while we were in London we saw plenty of old friends like John McLean, Mac Kriendler of "21" (he's a captain in our Air Force), and Lady Cavendish. She's Fred Astaire's sister Adele. Married well, didn't she?

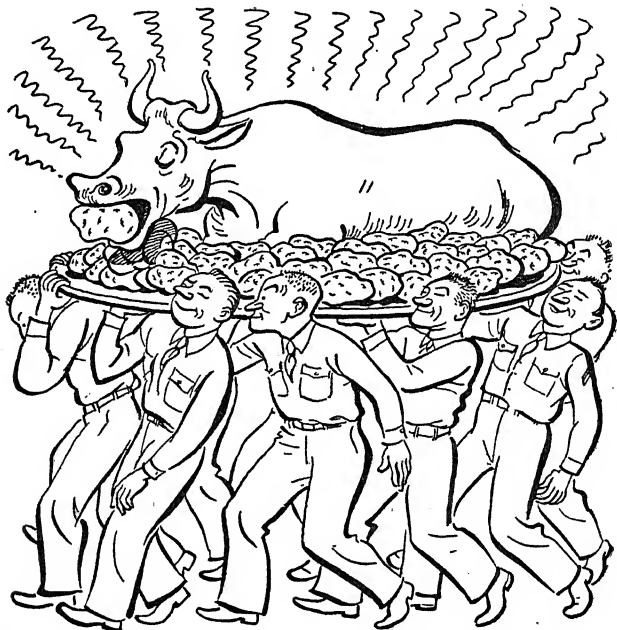
Menjou came to my room regularly bearing gifts. To us the English coffee tasted like tea. But from somewhere the resourceful Menjou had brought forth two cans of our own type of coffee. The kind with dated irium. He also brought us a couple of eggs. Nice things to bring *me*.

But when you take a person an egg in England, you love

him. Eggs were selling for fifty cents apiece. Hens were carrying lorgnettes, and the roosters wore spats and monocles. The two gals who drove us around used to bring us food, too. We frowned on this practice of theirs. But we were always careful to frown when they weren't looking.

While we were playing a camp, they'd scour the countryside, going from farmhouse to farmhouse saying, "You know Bob Hope, the American comedian? The man on the radio? Well, he's over here entertaining our boys, and he's hungry." Perhaps I'm twisting their words a little. What they really said was, "He's from hunger." But the English people gave, anyway.

The G.I.s had another angle to get eggs. They'd go to



42

When we played American installations the soldiers really laid out the victuals for us.

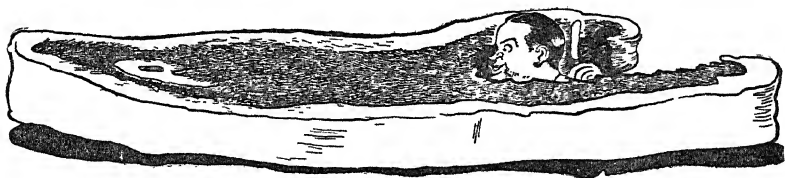
where the English girls candled the eggs. They never candled cracked ones, and there were always a lot of cracked ones when a G.I. was outside with some Hershey bars in his field jacket.

Of course, when we played American installations the soldiers really laid out the victuals for us. The way steaks would show up at our table, I got the idea some staff sergeant was hastily detailed to go out and bump off a cow. Lemons and tomatoes were also served. That was like being handed a pound and a half of radium. And the ice cream! It's beginning to sound so good I'd like to go back.

I just chuck that stuff in so you'll know your men in England—yes, and every place else I stopped—are eating fine and regularly. Except when actually fighting a battle, there are hot groceries available.

It's astounding, guys have told me, how fast the chow wagons follow the men. I was also impressed by how fast the men followed the chow wagons.

Seriously, so much is always being said about the fighting units of our Army, we forget that it takes about nine guys stretched all the way from somewhere in America to somewhere else in the world to keep one fighting man equipped and fed. Those nine guys are pitching, too. Wherever our soldiers go, they don't go hungry.



CHAPTER 6



We Left Them in the Isles

IN ENGLAND the Army plays a game called "jeep jumping." I say they play it in England because at the time I was over, England was the only place it could be played properly. This was due to the fact that one of the participants has to be a G.I. going to see a girl. The men in Africa, when I was there, not only didn't have time for jeep jumping—they didn't have girls. Africa ran more to fox-holes than to wolf traps.

But as I write this jeep jumping's probably gotten to be pretty good in Sicily and lower Italy. There, I understand, a guy not only can find a girl—she'll give him a dish of spaghetti with meat balls . . . if he brings his own meat.

The rules of jeep jumping are simple. Each contestant carries a distributor head. The G.I. who has a date with a dame waits until two other soldiers get out of a jeep, remove the distributor, and go into a store, building, or pub on some errand, enterprise, or mission. He then steps up to the jeep, inserts his distributor, and cuts out for his girl's house, hereinafter referred to as Shangri-La.

Since leaving the jeep in front of his doll's door would be a prelude to the stockade, he removes the distributor and

abandons the vehicle a short way from where the gal lives, covering the rest of the distance on the double.

Back where he came from, the two men whose jeep he has taken come out of the store, building, or pub having completed their errand, enterprise, or mission, and, not being able to find their jeep, realize immediately and without any consternation that it has been commandeered. They simply fall back on prescribed tactics and wait until two other soldiers drive up in another jeep, remove the distributor, and go into a store, building, or pub on an errand, enterprise, or mission. They then insert their distributor, take the second jeep, and drive back to camp.

It is considered unsportsmanlike, definitely not pukka, to go and return from any place in the same jeep. A G.I. who will do that is the sort of cad who would keep a four-inch trout, shoot a sitting bird, or milk a cow without taking off his ring.

Oh, yes, the jeep that was taken out to the girl's neighborhood is returned to town by the guy who saw the girl first. Any enterprising guy can get along great selling distributors. I made expenses.

Our third, fourth, and fifth weeks in the British Isles had a lot of the ad lib quality of jeep jumping—our group being the jeep, not knowing where we were going or who was taking us. The third week, all we knew definitely was that we had to be in Bristol for our first international broadcast on Saturday. As the days went by one camp seemed to run into another. And we seemed to run into all of them.

They all had hospitals near by, and it became a nightmare of beds you couldn't lie down in. But whenever we got tired, something made us forget ourselves. At one of the hospitals we saw some of the tank cases they'd brought back from the early African action around El Guettar Pass when the guys I later met in Africa were mopping up Rommel.

Those tank boys really take it. A rocket bursts inside a

tank, and it gets to be just like the inside of an oven when the chops start to burn. But those guys getting over those terrific burns not only grin and bear it—they figure they're living on velvet and when that's over wherever they go it'll be heaven. Because after what they've been through, hell wouldn't even seem stuffy.

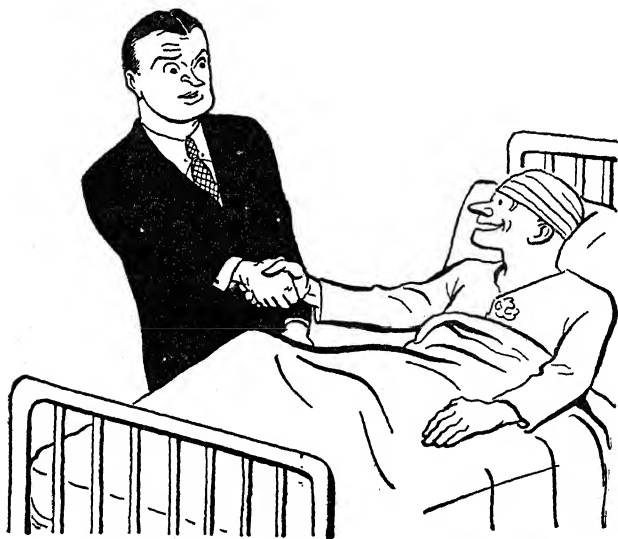
In one hospital, we were going through the wards saying hello to the guys. At one bed a kid was sleeping. He opened his eyes very slowly, and I said, "Hello, where you from?"

He just stared at me amazed for a few seconds. He kept blinking as if he couldn't believe what he was seeing. My kisser affects some people that way. I went right on smiling. Finally I began to feel silly standing there with my face wide open, so I said, "Yeah! It's me."

The kid looked at me questioningly and said, "Did you come here to entertain?"

I looked at him questioningly and said, "Are you kidding?"

Then the kid said, "Oh, now I know you! This is won-



"I've always wanted to meet Joe Cook."

derful! Imagine! You here! I've always wanted to meet Joe Cook."

He wasn't ribbing me, either. I wonder what they put in those ampules.

The hospital where this happened was just outside Oxford. I happen to remember this for two reasons. I thought I might have a tooth pulled there because I'd always wanted a part in a *Yank at Oxford*. The other reason was that when we came to the hospital outside Oxford I was sure I'd never left home.

Running into friends could happen anywhere. But when you start running into your wife's relatives you know you *must* be home.

I met Elizabeth Smith, Dolores' cousin. She was a nurse in the hospital. And she was so glad to see some folks from home, she hated to say good-by when we got ready to leave. Luckily she had a forty-eight-hour pass, so she came with us.

We were headed for a cavalry camp.

Frances, Jack, and Tony couldn't understand why the Army had brought cavalry over. I explained how they needed the horse soldiers on the African desert. I'd seen Foreign Legion movies. I made it very convincing. I was even surprised at how much I knew about it. We were supposed to rendezvous with an escort from the cavalry camp about thirty minutes from Oxford.

It figured to be kind of slow driving with an escort of horsemen, but it sounded like a novelty. I only hoped the horses didn't kick too much dust up my allergy.

When we got to the crossroads where the rendezvous was to be, there they were. And that was a beautiful sight—twenty identical, beautiful, glossy, perfectly matched motorcycles. A staff sergeant motioned to our drivers to follow them, and we started on what looked like that road race along the Riviera we used to see every year in the newsreels.

Those guys cut their sirens wide open, lashed them down,

and if Gabriel had blown his trumpet, Judgment Day would have gone by default. We sounded like Mayor La Guardia trying to get to eight different fires at once. Yes sir, for thirty minutes the sleepy lanes of Merrie Olde were the uptown branch of Bedlam.

People came running to their front doors. The air was full of expectancy and livestock. Mothers clutched shrieking infants to their bosoms. Constables fell off their bicycles, scratched their heads, and went into the nearest pub convinced it must have been Churchill or at least Orson Welles.

We didn't see one horse at that cavalry camp.

So I said, "Cavalry and no horses?"

One of the men just smiled and said, "They're Crosby's horses. They haven't arrived yet."

Believe me, he won't smile when they arrive.

Those cavalry guys were sure glad to see us. After the show some of the men invited us over to the PX for a party they'd rigged. Chocolate ice cream!

At that time giving us chocolate ice cream was about the equivalent of giving us a half interest in the Bethlehem Steel Company, the only difference being that the Bethlehem Steel Company features a different kind of nut.

The next thing I knew we were on our way to Heathcliffe's stamping grounds, the moors, down around Devonshire. It rained the whole time we were there. About thirteen hundred guys waited three hours to see us in a rain that was going sideways. We figured if they could do that, it wouldn't hurt us either. So we did the show.

It was raining so hard you couldn't expect the men to laugh at the jokes. They gargled. One guy came up to me and said, "I saw *Wuthering Heights* back home in Columbus. Now I know what made Heathcliffe act like that."

I told him, "We have rain like that in California, too." He said, "But at least it fills the yard with beautiful flowers." "Yes," I said, "it's really wonderful to be able to sit on your roof and pick water lilies."



So we did the show.

The commanding officer told us that a bunch of men were further out on the moors on maneuvers and had missed us. He seemed to think they'd be sore. So we talked it over, and the Colonel decided it might help toughen them up to make them see our show. We drove about a half hour through more of the same rain and did another show out in a field. More moors. That day they were sewers with grass. I saw a lot of bats around and told the Colonel I thought bats only came out at night. The Colonel told me they weren't bats. They were field mice wearing water wings. The guys on maneuvers were infantry when they started, but I'll bet when they came back to camp they were all transferred to the Amphibious Command.

Saturday we checked in at Bristol for the broadcast, played

a few camps and hospitals in the neighborhood, and then went down to our rooms at Claridge's in London to do our washing. It really was funny being in one of the best hotels in the world washing my own shirts. A little like darning your own socks between drinks at the Stork. I gave my shirts the fast collar and cuff treatment and then phoned down to see if I could get them ironed. Mother Langford finally obliged.

After we'd rinsed out a few things we hit the road again. Ran into Captain Eddie Rickenbacker at one camp. He was just back from Africa, where he'd been doing a little morale boosting. I knew Rick because he used to run a show for the American Legion in Bronxville. I played it every year.

Eddie asked me as a special favor, when I played the Bronxville Post, after the war, to try to remember not to make the guys listen to the same jokes they'd survived while fighting. He said it might make them wonder if they'd really won.

Later that week we got a chance to do a show for the RAF. I was glad. Those guys can really take it. And, as the British say, "They've had it!" We did an impromptu show for a bunch of RAF men at an airfield outside Liverpool. The plane we were knocking around the northern part of England in blew a tire and we had to lay over a few hours to fix it.

While I was getting out my pump and tire patches, the Wing Commander asked us if we couldn't do a show while we were waiting. I said we'd be glad to but asked how could he get enough people together in so short a time. "We'll have them here in five minutes, old boy," he said. "They're all right around. You see, nobody had any warning that you were coming."

Sure enough, he was right. In less than five minutes there were at least three hundred men on hand. I was worried whether they'd get our jokes. But I had it proved again that

a good gag is a good gag anywhere, and that a change of geography never improved an egg.

After the show we still had some time, so the RAF gave us dinner. Typical English dinner: roast beef, Yorkshire pudding, and that sort of solid stuff. The beef was particularly wonderful. "Aren't you eating rather well?" I asked rudely.

The Wing Commander said, "Eat it, old boy, and be happy with it."

That's what I mean by English reserve. He didn't bother to tell me why they ate so well. But I knew. They figure, like we do, that there's nothing too good for boys doing their kind of job. Others had told me how a single RAF bomber base sometimes loses as many as fifteen planes on just one mission. And I've been told how those RAF kids handle that grim fact. They come in, walk up to the bulletin board, read the names of their buddies who are missing, and turn without a word to get a cup of tea.

There's nothing to talk about. It's that kind of tight-lipped reserve that you develop after four years of war. Those kids all knew exactly why they were fighting. They'd seen their cities, their buildings, their homes, and the people they loved bombed to eternity.

Somehow that Wing Commander made me understand all that just by the tone of his voice when he said simply, "Eat it, old boy, and be happy with it."

His words reminded me of what Clark Gable had told me about our own men coming back from missions over France and Germany. Our guys weren't born to be killers any more than those RAF kids. Clark told me about youngsters back from their first foray over enemy territory who would jump out of the plane and hit the ground with their fists and cry, "I'll never go again!"

That's the way a guy acts when he's seen his buddy blown to pieces before his eyes. And it's good that he acts that way. If he doesn't, if he tries to keep from giving vent to his

emotions, then he's heading for a real mental crack-up.

But when a kid hits home hysterical, one of the flight surgeons just quietly slips an arm around him and takes him away. He spends a few weeks in a rest home and comes out in perfect shape. Believe me, you've got to be over there to see for yourself how far psychiatry, as well as surgery, has come since this war started. Today the psychiatrist knows just how to treat men who have seen things men should never have to see. And the men themselves develop a sort of flip fatalism that isn't bravado, stupidity, or even courage. It's just fact, faced.

We were kidding around with some of the men, passing gags back and forth—nothing worth remembering or I'd remember it . . . I never forget a gag—and I asked a bomber pilot from Alabama how it was out on a mission.

"It's really nothin', mister," he said in that quiet southern way. "Sometimes it's a right pleasant ride . . . if you ride both ways."

"Pretty tough, eh?" I said.

"Not at all, mister. There's really nothin' to it at all if the fighters don't get too thick and they don't annoy you with that flak."

"Just exactly what is flak?" I asked.

"Nothin' worth talkin' about, mister. Just a hunk of steel flyin' through the air . . . red hot. It just cuts your head off, that's all."

We did one show at a hospital around Exeter where they take care of the advanced cases of war fatigue. Those boys were in pretty bad shape. There were about five hundred at the show, and the doctors wanted us to do a performance for them, mostly to try to shake them out of their moodiness by bringing them together, creating a sort of mob psychology. I didn't quite get it. And those guys didn't quite get us.

We got very few laughs. And those we did get were in funny places and scattered. I mean there were absolutely no

spots where the whole audience roared out together the way you hear an audience do in a theater or at a broadcast. The laughs would come from individuals to whom a phrase or line or word that wasn't really a joke at all would, for some private reason, seem funny. Frances went over very big. In her they recognized familiar, friendly things. But as for me . . . it was one of the hardest jobs I think I've ever done in my life to stay on that stage.

After the show was over the staff insisted that we do a show for them. I think they really did it to find out if we were fit to leave. I could see all the psychiatrists shaking their heads. Later they told me about a town in England where they send all the cases that need major plastic surgery. The hospital takes care of them as fast as it can. But while they're waiting, the people in town have been taught to ignore all disfigurements. In that way the psychological cure is started even before any operations take place. The boys are encouraged to walk around town. Naturally, nobody stares at them or makes any acknowledgment whatsoever that their faces aren't perfectly normal.

It's strange—war not only teaches men how to kill each other, it also teaches them how to be kind and considerate to a degree that couldn't be taught any other way.

It was while we were playing the installations in the northern part of England that I got word my granddad had died, just one month short of a hundred years old. The Army flew me down to Hitchin, and the night before the funeral I spent with the Kilbys. Again they were wonderful.

Granddad's was a strange funeral. Maybe not to Hitchin, but to me. James Hope was one of the town's leading citizens, certainly its oldest. And they turned out *en masse* to pay their respects.

The casket was placed in a great big handsome Rolls-Royce hearse—if a hearse can be called handsome—by six professional pallbearers, old men in silk stovepipe hats. The

Rolls rolled quietly through the streets of Hitchin lined with townfolks, and the six old men trotted alongside it.

It was kind of hard for me to get very upset emotionally over the death of a man who had led a long, happy, and successful life at a time when so many people were being deprived of that privilege. Granddad was a terrific guy, a complete success in his chosen field in his chosen territory. Nobody can be any more than that!

Hal Block and Bill Dover met me in Hitchin to make the trip with me to Ireland. Also Bob Considine to do a story for International News Service. It was around noon when we left Hitchin. We were due to do a show in Belfast at three that same day.

On the way to the airport we passed a place that had a sign saying "Burton's Infirmary Darts Club." I told the guys I had to stop in there a minute on business. They all came in with me. So it's no secret that we filled out a membership blank for Bing Crosby. Where it said "suggested by," we wrote Rudolf Hess.

We also sent Bing a picture post card of the only street of a little English village. There was one guy in the picture. We wrote on it, "Holiday Inn is showing here. You're packin' 'em in!" I kept thinking how Bing would like England . . . he's at the age where a cup of tea rests him.

The RAF flew us from Hitchin to the spot where we transferred to an American plane of the ATC. And the RAF chap let me pilot his ship for a little bit. When he saw who was flying the ship Block wrote on a card, "No ad libbing," and Considine held it in front of me. I just brushed it off. It's not generally known that I have over a thousand hours' air experience. I got it filling tires at a service station. But kidding aside, I am an expert pilot. I have something like twenty hours to my credit. There are only two things I can't do. Well, I say "I can't." I mean I've never tried. One is take a plane off, the other is land it. I'm told you have to be pretty

good at both these things before you're considered much of a pilot.

But I can do all right at the controls if we're high enough and the automatic pilot's on.

At an American air base near the Irish Sea we changed to a big C-47. They're like the twin-engine planes the air lines fly, only they're for carrying cargo and military personnel. There are none of those nice plush seats. The seats run along the side like in a subway car, with indentations at intervals deep enough to hold a paratrooper's parachute and that part of him a lot of them land on.

During the flight across the Irish Sea to Belfast I rolled up my raincoat and took a light sleep stretched out on these bucket seats. It was like dozing off on a row of wash basins in the men's room at the Astor.

They didn't let us fool around very long when we hit the Irish bases. We were rushed right off to a spot where a stage had been set up in one end of a Nissen Hut. That's a cement mixer with cross ventilation. I'd rather play outdoors. When crowded, those Nissen Huts get to be sort of like oxygen tents without oxygen. The spotlight didn't work. The mike had laryngitis. But I should have known things would go wrong when I walked in and heard them playing Crosby on the P.A. system.

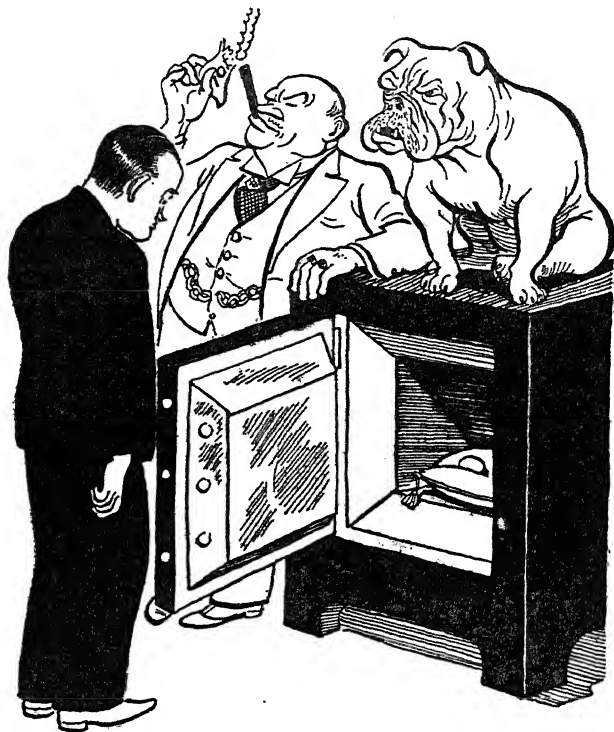
I started the show by hollering, "Get that horse doctor off the air." They asked me why Bing wasn't with me. So I told them he wanted to come but one of his horses was dying and it was his first chance to see one of them finish.

There was a hospital there, too, and after the show for all the guys in wheel chairs they took us through the wards. One little kid who'd taken a 45-caliber bullet right through his neck from mastoid to mastoid hollered, "Hey, Hope, come on over here." He was pretty scrawny. "Did you ever hear of Atlas?" he asked.

I said, "Sure, Why?"

"Well, I'm his brudder meatless!"

What spirit those kids have! Nothing stops them. That evening we stayed in Belfast. In fact, we were in Belfast three days and met some of the richest people in town. I met one guy who owned an egg outright. If you think I'm kidding, a



I met one guy who owned an egg outright.

guy gave us five. They were the first we'd had in four weeks, and we could hardly wait to get back to our hotel, where we had a party—soft-boiled eggs at two A.M.

My first morning in Belfast I saw all the American soldiers around town, and I began to understand how Lend-Lease works. There are about twenty thousand Irishmen in blue uniforms walking the streets of New York, so we lend Belfast

about the same number of Americans in khaki uniforms.

While we were in Ireland we played a show for the employees at a Lockheed plant. It's what they call a modification plant. That's where they take the P-38s and adjust them to the climate they're going to fly in, the way they issue different-weight underwear according to the climate a G.I.'s going to fight in. He gets shorts for Africa. And for Iceland, Alaska, and the Aleutians they issue full-length features.

The next spot we played in Ireland was a submarine base. I wish I could name it. It's got a beautiful name. But the submarine boys are known as the silent service, and I wouldn't want it to get around that I blabbed. We were told that when the kids come in from those sub missions they want to laugh. So we went down there prepared to give those sub guys all we had. We were taken directly to the Officers' Club. Those officers were really glad to see us. They gave us a wonderful dinner, and we did a little show for them. It kept getting later and later, and they kept feeding us more and more lavishly.

There seemed to be nothing important to those guys. And that's the way it was. Nothing *was* very important to them. The submarine base had been moved a couple of weeks before. There was no submarine personnel around, and they were just a skeleton force on hand to guard the property. That's why they were glad to see us. They were lonesome. The silent service had pulled out and hadn't bothered to tell anyone they were leaving.

All the time we were knocking around Ireland, Hal Block and I were trying to dope out stuff to do at a big United Nations show that was scheduled for the Odeon Theatre in London. It was to feature all the talent in all the U.S.O. Camp Shows in England. There were times when I didn't think we'd make it.

They took us to do some shows for the Navy at Londonderry in a Flying Fortress called "Mr. Five-by-Five." Before we got on, the Army gave us forms to sign absolving them

of all responsibility in case of accident. They also wanted to know whom to notify in case of death.

I put down "Louella Parsons, Los Angeles *Examiner*," because I'd promised Lolly first crack at it. I hated to do it, because I knew if it ever happened Hedda Hopper would never speak to me again.

I watched how those guys flew that Fortress, and it was poetry . . . pure poetry. It must have been poetry. I didn't understand it at all. When we took off I was in the tail gunner's compartment. Then I crawled into the place where the navigator works. Then I crawled up to be with the belly gunner. Then I crawled up front where the bombardier sits. I crawled around so much I heard the pilot say, "It's always like this when we bring the children."

I couldn't help telling him what a master I thought he was. His name was Lowe. He handed me some clippings about his daredevil antics when he'd been a test pilot ripping wings off pursuit ships and stunting bombers. Reading about him almost stunted my growth.

We had a great time at Londonderry. That was almost like the big naval bases in the States, only the Marines had formed a Bagpipe Band. Only Marines would have the guts to try to top the North Irish on the bagpipes. And they nearly did. In an all-Irish bagpipe contest I'm told the United States Marines Bagpipe Band came in second.

Frances and I tried playing the pipes. They're a little unwieldy for a beginner. They are also not so darned wieldy for an expert. And as musical instruments you can have them. A cow makes the same noise and gives milk. If a set of bagpipes had four legs, a tail, and a pair of horns I'll bet *it* would give milk too. But the Marines at Londonderry were glad to see us. That's us spelled F-R-A-N-C-E-S.

I've seen some pretty tough Marines but nothing to compare to those seagoing soldiers at Londonderry. One guy had so much hair on his chest that when he leaned over to shoot

craps he shined his shoes. A fellow from Ohio asked for an autograph, then pulled off his shirt and handed me a tattoo needle. I shook hands with a guy from Kansas. When I got my hand back there were only four fingers. I said,



If a set of bagpipes had four legs, a tail, and a pair of horns I'll bet it would give milk too.

"What's the idea?" He said, "Twenty-per-cent withholding tax." Looking at it from all angles, a Marine is really nothing but a booby trap that's on our side.

Of course the sailors entertained us royally, too, at Londonderry. They took me to the mess hall, they took me to the

parade grounds, they took me to the dry docks, they took me to the barracks, then they got out the dice, and then they took me.

I got to talking to one sailor who hadn't been home in over a year. All he had to say about that was, "I guess that's what the man meant when he said, 'I have given the best years of my wife to my country.'"

The nicest memory we brought back to London from Ireland was a pound of Irish bacon and two great big thick porterhouse steaks that had been given to us by . . . well, figure it out . . . who would give us bacon and steaks but a vegetarian. You think I mean George Bernard Shaw, but I don't. He and I didn't meet. He arranged it.

All the way home we thought about neither the steaks nor the bacon. Tony kept talking about spaghetti and meat balls. We got in late in the evening. There was plenty of spaghetti at the hotel, but naturally no meat. So we ground up the two steaks. It was exactly like melting down your brand-new tires to make rubber bands so you can shoot spitballs.

The show at the Odeon turned out all right. Somebody told me the King and Queen were there . . . and after the King saw my act he whispered to the Queen, "I see we're beginning to pay back for Lend-Lease."

Besides Frances Langford, Tony Romano, and Jack Pepper there was Adolphe Menjou, Hank Ladd, Francetta Malloy, Grace Driesdale, Eddie Cochran, Brucetta, Hal LeRoy, Stubby Kay, the Blossom Sisters, a really great swing band under Warrant Officer Frank Rossotto, and a tremendous audience. When we came to the theater in the morning they were already queued up waiting for the box office to open.

All of a sudden, right down along the line of people standing waiting to buy tickets, comes a guy turning flip-flops. I was amazed. I didn't know you could get that kind of liquor any more.

When he got to the end of the queue this flip-flopper



He and I didn't meet. He arranged it.

stopped and his partner started passing the hat. Then I realized they were buskers. Charles Laughton made a picture about the buskers. They're a strictly British type of show business, actors who work only on the street. I was on the street for years in Cleveland. But in the United States they don't call them buskers. They call them bums.

I thought about those days in Cleveland and what people

used to call me, a couple of days later while I was sitting in Winston Churchill's study at 10 Downing Street . . . and wondering how to get out. How I got in is even stranger.

A day before I'd been invited to a cocktail party at the Dorchester by Senator "Happy" Chandler. I'll never forget the first time I met him in Hollywood. I thought they were kidding when they introduced him as a Senator. I'd never heard of a Senator with muscles. He shook hands like a Marine. Senator Chandler was in London with four other wandering Senators. And that was some cocktail party. I never saw so much gold braid and striped trousers. I got to meet General Devers, who was the commander of the whole area, and General Eaker, of the Eighth Air Force, and other star officers like Generals Lee and Edwards and Admiral Stark. In fact, there was so much brass you couldn't hear the fiddles in the orchestra.

I also rubbed elbows with gents like W. Averell Harriman, Anthony Drexel Biddle, and Ambassador John Winant. But I don't think rubbing elbows will ever take the place of shaking hands.

The guy I was most anxious to meet didn't show up. I mean Churchill.

I'm sure I wasn't the only actor who came to London and wanted to meet Churchill. But I'll bet I wanted to meet him more. I'd heard he ran American movie comedies for relaxation and that he'd seen some of mine. Great men like a good mystery, and trying to find what was funny about my pictures was probably a mystery to Churchill.

Anyway, I wanted to meet him. So the next day when Senator Chandler called to ask if I'd like to go to the House of Commons, I said, "Yeah. Do you think there's a chance to meet Churchill?"

He said, "Why not? We're all going to meet Churchill today. Why not come along?"

"Why not?" I said.

A Rolls-Royce with a big C.D. on it showed up, and I met

Captain Boch, who was military aide to the Senators while they were in England.

A few minutes later the car stopped in front of 10 Downing Street, and as soon as I associated the number on the door with the man I was going to see I realized the C.D. must stand for Churchill Delivery.

The Senators were already there, and as we entered someone said something and everybody got up and stood in line. I was in line, too. Ambassador Winant was introducing the Senators to the Prime Minister. I followed Senator Mead and came as quite a surprise to Ambassador Winant because "Happy" hadn't told anybody he was bringing a friend.

Winant just stared at me fascinated—the way you stare at a fly in somebody else's soup. It presents a problem. To mention it is embarrassing. But you can't ignore it.

Winant didn't ever get to say anything. The reception line stopped, and I was in front of Churchill. He looked at me. Then he looked again. It was kind of like that scene Crosby and I did in the picture *My Favorite Blonde* where I ask a guy for a match. It's Bing. I go back and look at him again and say, "No! It can't be!"

I grabbed Churchill's hand and said, "Pleased to meet you, Mr. Churchill." I squeezed as hard as I could, but the ring wouldn't come off.

He just looked at me as if to say, "Where have I seen that kisser before?"

Then the five Senators and the Prime Minister adjourned to the garden to settle the war, and Ambassador Winant motioned me to wait in Churchill's study. I told Winant all I wanted was to get Churchill's name on my short-snorter, and he took that out into the garden with him.

Captain Boch and I wandered around Churchill's office for a while looking at the maps and stuff and feeling like two reformed shoplifters in Tiffany's. We gawked at things, like a couple of Okies in Radio City Music Hall.

Finally Winant came back with the short-snorter all signed,

so Captain Boch and I adjourned to the outer hall, where we didn't have a feeling of responsibility for all Churchill's stuff. The Senators continued in conference, while I tried on Churchill's hat and did a few other silly things like a kid cuttin' up in a Sunday school cloakroom. At last I got tired of waiting and said I'd go. So they asked me to sign the guest book. If they haven't erased it, you'll find my name right after General Giraud's.

Someday I'd like to meet Mr. Churchill.

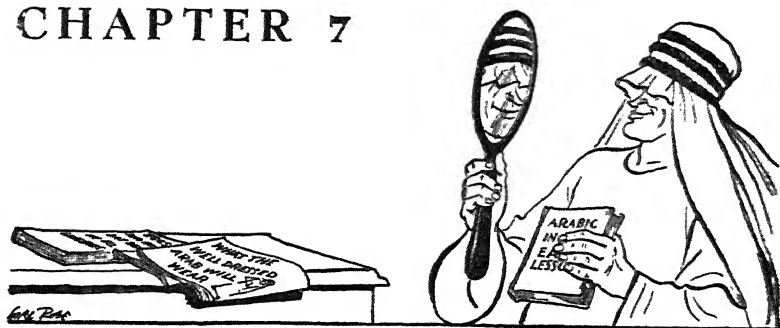
A couple of days later we started for Africa. Almost our last show in England was at a camp where about a thousand new men had just arrived from America. Naturally, being an old hand at British ways and customs, I based our whole show on telling these men about England.

I told them that everyone rides a bicycle and how an American pilot who had been on thirty-one missions over Germany fell off a bike and was given the Purple Heart. I told them that English girls didn't mind going cycling, but that sometimes riding on the handle bars made them sore.

Probably the most important thing I was able to explain to the men were the insignia of the British junior officers. They're little round disks, sort of like beehives, and the English call them pips. One pip's a subaltern, two's a lieutenant, and three's a captain . . . I think.

The girls in the WAAFs wear the same insignia. I happened to know because I was out with a gal who told me she was a Lieutenant, and she had two pips.

CHAPTER 7



We're Off on the Road to Morocco

OUR jumping-off-place for North Africa was Prestwick, Scotland. To geographers Prestwick is a town. To golfers it's the only eighteen holes in the world that have a mayor and a city hall. Prestwick is where every golfer who ever broke a club wants to make a hole in one. It's where Crosby wants to make his dream shot . . . shoot a birdie and bring down the stork.

Many a time at Lakeside or Hillcrest in Los Angeles, I've pretended I was teeing up to smack one down the middle of the fairway at Prestwick. And I often came closer to the middle of the fairway at Prestwick than I did to the course I was playing. But that doesn't bother me. I don't pamper myself on a golf course. I'm used to roughing it.

Today, although the wonderful old links is still there and open to golfers who have time to play, Prestwick is more famous as one of the "A" spots in Global Aviation. It's the junction where military personnel from all over the E.T.O. (that's hep military lingo for European Theater of Operations) change planes for some other part of the western world. They used to say if you sat in front of a café on the Rue de la Paix, sooner or later everybody you knew would go by. Now you sit in the Officers' Club at Prestwick.

As we came in from England, Captain Bill Mellor and Major George Stevens of the Army Signal Corps came in from Cairo. Bill Mellor was the cameraman on *The Road to Morocco*. George Stevens is one of Hollywood's best comedy directors. We were on our way to Marrakech, Morocco, and they were on their way to the United States for a couple of weeks.

What a chin fest we had! I said, "Hello."

They said, "Hello."

And they took off.

It's little moments like that a man treasures.

There were ATC planes idling on the runway for more spots than Crosby and I have built roads to. ATC—that's Air Transport Command. They're as at home in India as they are on Attu. They really get around fast. Why, those ATC men travel so fast it's possible for them to have jungle fever and frostbite at the same time. Watching those big transport planes take off full of men and matériel for every battle station in the world was really thrilling. I was surprised. I really was. Imagine my getting a thrill out of watching *men* take off on a runway.

Lieutenant Conley of Army Special Service gave us a few very busy days in Prestwick. The first morning I naturally looked forward to playing a little golf. So bright and early Tony, Jack, Frances, and I got into a car and were driven to a big aircraft factory outside of Prestwick, where we did a show for the aircraft workers. It was the first time I'd ever played before a Scotch audience. Now I'm more fond of Scotch than ever. Of course, I don't know how they would have been if they'd paid to see the show. But getting it for nothing, with time off from work—practically being paid to see us—they were very kind. Those Scotchmen really gave. At least I think they did. They all had on coveralls instead of kilts. If they'd had their kilts on I could have seen which way the wind blew. Frankly, I was surprised to find all the men in

Scotland wearing pants, but then visitors to California have told me they're surprised to see women wearing skirts.

We rushed back to town that afternoon to do a show for the military personnel of the neighborhood. It struck me kind of funny. There were about ten thousand civilians from the area around Prestwick all milling around the theater trying to get in. But the way things are now, if you want to see a show you have to join the Army. Gives you an idea how times have changed. Today vaudeville comes with the bullets. It used to be vice versa.

It was great, though, the way that crowd of civilians waited for us. They put on such a show I felt that paying a shilling a head for them was really worth it. The MPs could hardly hold them back when we came out of the theater. So we ducked back and tried to figure out how Frank Leahy or Pappa Stagg would get out of the place.

Finally we worked out a sort of Statue of Liberty play where we had a cab parked down the block on one street. Then we had a guy go out the other entrance and holler, "They went this way." The mob rushed in that direction and we got out. I was lucky to escape them. It's kind of embarrassing to have the reputation I have of giving away a Sheaffer Lifetime Fountain Pen with every autograph. People who ask for autographs get nasty when you have to tell them you've run out of pens.

The next morning we played the hospital in Prestwick and were scheduled to take off at noon. I'd had no golf. But my Aunt Lucy or someone was looking after me. The plane's departure was postponed until six, so I really did get to bat a few around Prestwick.

At first it was embarrassing. I mean having those people watch me. They really know how to play golf. Then I hit on the idea of having Frances Langford caddy for me. In that way it took the men's attention off my form.

After the game the pro at the Prestwick Golf Club gave me

two very old golf sticks and a seventy-five-year-old golf ball. Imagine giving a visitor a second-hand ball. The clubs are wonderful, too. One is wood and looks like a cross between a mallet and a baseball bat. It's called a baffle. The other's an iron with enough metal in it to make the keel of a Liberty Ship. It's the first iron golf club ever forged by a blacksmith. And it's a shame for me to keep it when the Navy could use it so well. It would make a great anchor.

The Golf Club at Prestwick is right by the railroad station. And after the eighteenth hole they were taking a few pictures, which attracted the attention of a gang of British Commandos who were waiting in the station for a train to take them to an unknown destination. These guys got a load of Langford and started to holler and yell. Naturally, we went over and did a show for them. Had to climb a wall to do it, but nothing stopped us. Even the Commandos couldn't stand us off. We weren't scared of their blacked-up faces. They were all ready for combat. Come to think of it, that was probably the first vaudeville show on record at which the performers all worked white-face and the audience blacked up.

Frances made one mistake with that bunch. They asked for good-by kisses, and she kissed one guy. We nearly got trampled to death.

Just before we left Prestwick for Marrakech, we lost two of our party, the two newsreel cameramen Paramount had tailing us all over England. No arrangements had been made for them to follow us to Africa, so practically the last thing we saw of Scotland was these two guys, Rodney and Arthur, photographing our departure.

Departures are generally very dull, even when you're excited inside, so you know the newsreel people take that kind of footage for only one reason . . . "Here is Hope and party laughing and gay as they left for Africa. Navy planes are still scouring the area." Think I'm kidding, huh?

Just before the plane took off for Morocco a nice young

man said, "Please listen very carefully and I'll explain to you how the Mae Wests work." Well, that was something I'd wanted to know for years, so naturally I paid very close attention. It turned out he was giving us "ditching" instructions. That's how to "ditch" the ship if she's forced down at sea.

The guy explained in great detail how to put on the Mae West and how to pull the little string that inflates it automatically. That sounded silly to me. Imagine inflating a Mae West. That's like giving Henry J. Kaiser a rowboat. Anyway, you do it by pulling a string attached to a valve on a tiny pressure capsule. It seemed easy enough to do. But he told us if by any chance the pressure capsule didn't work, we could open a certain little screw and blow up the jacket manually.

"I suppose," I said, "if you don't blow fast enough a friendly shark comes up and helps you!" Our instructor just looked at me and said, "You'll be able to do all the blowing you have to do."

He then told us we were to listen for two sounds. One was the front of the plane hitting the water. Two was the back of the plane hitting the water. Three, I figured, would be me hitting the water. He showed us which door to rush out of while the rubber rafts were tossed out of another door. And he told us we had to hurry, because once the plane settled in the water it sank in three minutes. He finished with "Happy voyage!" And shook hands with my goose-pimples.

Grateful as you are for these instructions, they don't calm you down, and we all kept watching one another for signs of nervousness. Fortunately, I had a book with me, so I read all the way to Marrakech. I read the second page on the trip back to England. England! When we were there it really *was* what the German radio called it: "An American Airplane Carrier."

Besides our troupe there were a bunch of Air Transport Command guys, two Phillipses, two Stones, a Shepherd, a Ravenscroft, a Sherwood, and one named Urquhart. One of

the Phillips boys was the Captain, Herbert R. Phillips. Urquhart turned out to be of tremendous value to us later, on our way back to England.



I read all the way to Marrakech.

It didn't take long for the coastline to disappear. Someone pulled down the shade. The Air Transport Command takes a great big circular swing at North Africa for purposes of security. Of course, I recognized this right away. As soon as I could, I looked down and saw nothing but water under us. Naturally, I knew we were taking a strange route. I'd been on *The Road to Morocco* before. I went forward to talk to the pilot. I thought he was lost. When I saw what was going on I thought we were all lost.

Nobody was doing anything about running the plane. No-

body was paying any attention at all to flying, just cutting up a few touches. The ship was on the mechanical pilot.

The crew wanted to know all about our trip across the Atlantic, particularly about the weather. Those Air Transport boys worry more about the weather than a girl who's been chosen Queen of the May. They wanted to know whether it was foggy coming into the British Isles. I told them it had looked like a very heavy fog to me but that Captain Vaughn of the Clipper just smiled and said, "Churchill's cigar smoke."

While I was talking to the pilot and copilot another crew member, a tall guy named Ravenscroft, introduced himself by saying he used to be on Bing Crosby's radio program. That sort of made him one of my dependents. Naturally, I asked what he did on the Crosby clambake, and he told me he used to be with the Paul Taylor Choristers. Remember them? Ravenscroft said he sang bass. So I got Tony and Jack, and we had a quartet. For two hours we harmonized on every old tune we could think of, winding up with the entire gang joining in "We're Off on the Road to Morocco." It turned out that Ravenscroft was the navigator of our little C-54.

I found this out when the Captain said the stars were out. Ravenscroft excused himself for a minute, took a quick peek up through a little hole, made some fast calculations, and said, "We'll be in Marrakech in nine hours." Shows you how much those navigators know. He was almost five minutes off.

What a reception we got in Marrakech! The greetings we'd received when we landed in England and at all the different spots we'd played in the British Isles had made us kind of used to receptions. But I'm not kidding when I say we certainly weren't prepared for what we got in Marrakech. You can't imagine it. And I don't think I can describe it.

But to put it into the fewest words possible, not a soul was there, to meet us.

It turned out we arrived in Marrakech three days late be-

cause of having played extra shows in Prestwick. And I don't mind telling you it's pretty grim climbing out of a transport plane in the middle of Morocco to find you're entirely on your own. I suddenly wished we'd landed somewhere else in Morocco. I mean, if we'd hit Casablanca I could have phoned Humphrey Bogart and he'd have taken care of us. He might even have introduced us to Ingrid Bergman. As it was, I didn't know a soul in Marrakech, I thought.

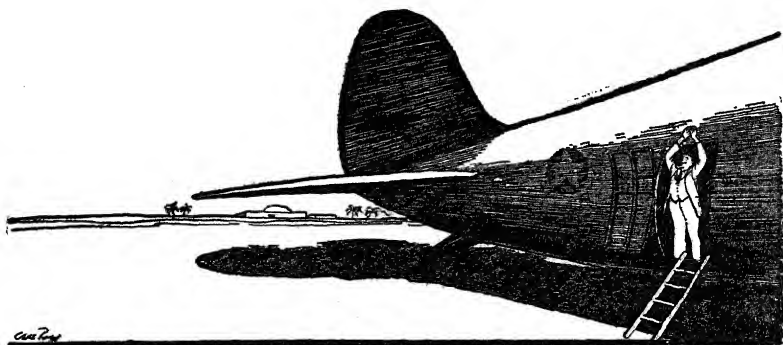
The four of us were struggling across the airfield alone when I saw about ten Army cars, each with a motorcycle escort. I waved my hand and hollered, "Hey! Here I am!"

A couple of G.I.s on motorcycles got one look at Frances and hollered back, "Who cares where you are! Send the babe over where we are."

It turned out that the Army was there to act as an escort for those five Senators in whose company I'd "met" Mr. Churchill. They were expected any minute.

I didn't think I ought to crash their party again. So our little group staggered into the airport café with our eyes half closed from lack of sleep and started to look for the Travelers' Aid desk.

All of a sudden a lieutenant comes up and says, "When did you get in? We didn't think you were going to make it!" It



What a reception we got in Marrakech!

was a man who used to be a cop in St. Louis, now Lieutenant Frank Choury, head Provost Marshal of Marrakech. That means he ran the Military Police. Frank and the officer with him, Lieutenant Bruce Pinter, took us over to a hotel and got us some breakfast and a place to clean up a little. He then told us that General Doolittle had a B-17 waiting at Marrakech for two days to take us to Tunis. But, when we didn't show, they thought the trip had been called off. This made us feel a little better.

We had quite a day in Marrakech. Choury asked if we wanted to see the native village, which is the original old walled section of the town. It's a sensational place. You walk in, look around, and stop dead in your tracks. You just can't believe your nose.

That was the first place I saw African women wearing veils. In the more modern part of Marrakech they wear Venetian blinds.

Honestly, that native section of Marrakech couldn't have looked more the way you'd expect it to look if it had been built by a Hollywood studio. There were so many characters in fezzes, it looked like Newark during a Shriners' convention. There were hundreds of beggars and a lot of guys kneeling on rugs praying. Reminds you of option time at Paramount . . . till they get up and try to sell you the rug. Probably praying for customers.

As soon as we entered the town Frank told us to watch our pocketbooks, and four or five dirty-looking characters started tailing us. I felt to make sure the leather was still in my jeans, because I knew right away that was what they wanted. They wanted their pocketbooks back. But when they began closing in a little too close Frank told them, through an interpreter, to go away and leave us alone. They vanished immediately and stayed away for almost a minute.

I bought a rug. The guy asked seventy-five thousand francs for it. That's about \$350. But Frank told me they want to

bargain because they love to bargain. So we bargained. I finally paid \$85. When I got back I saw one just like it in North Hollywood for \$40. But the funniest thing about the sale was when it was all over and I'd paid the shopkeeper for the rug, I found that the character I'd been bargaining with wasn't connected with the rug dealer in any way.



So we bargained.

He just came in to bargain and expected me to give him some money for bargaining with me. Now I see why they like to bargain. They get paid for it. Frank told me these guys are known as bargainers. In Hollywood we call them agents.

Later that afternoon one of the Army doctors took us through the Pasha's Palace. Nice joint. It would make Radio City Music Hall look like a broom closet. But the Pash'

needed a big place. He's got 150 wives. And I got a confidential report that he's cheating on the side.

Natives say it's really tough on the Pasha with those 150 fraus. By the time he's through kissing them all good night, he has to start all over again. If they have a fight it's reported by John Gunther. And they say the Pasha's become such an expert on marital matters, Mr. Anthony writes to *him* for advice.

We met his son. I said, "Hello." He smiled at Frances. And the Army doctor and I talked for the rest of the afternoon.

After tea the Pasha's kid showed us the Palace's private eighteen-hole golf course. I forget now whether it was inside or outside the Palace. This was only one of a chain of seven such spots that the Pasha has. They're paid for by tribute from his constituents. Nice racket. I wonder how a guy goes about getting himself a little Pasha-nate. (Note to Editor: get printer with strong stomach.)

Finally, we took off for Algiers. We got the same ovation there that we got at Marrakech. We were still three days late. So we phoned Tunis, and the Army came to fetch us. We waited at the Aletti Hotel until Colonel David, Colonel Stretch, and Captain Mike Cullen, of Army Special Service, and Colonel Wheeler of the Twelfth Air Force showed up to take care of us. The city had certainly changed. The last time I saw Algiers, Charles Boyer was in it.

Really, though, at Algiers we got our first gander at war fresh off the griddle. The Aletti Hotel is only about two blocks from the harbor, and we could see men working on boats that had recently been bombed. One wreck was still burning from a raid that had taken place a week before. It had been an ammunition ship.

The suit I was wearing with the nice warm padded shoulders wasn't any good for Africa. So the first thing Colonel David did was to give me a green linen job. How he happened to have a green linen suit is none of our business. He'd bought

it once, maybe in Cairo. There was no place in Algiers where I could have gotten any clothes. That green linen ensemble was my home in Africa and Sicily for the next four weeks.

But no matter what happened to it, I always looked better than anyone else in Algeria or Tunisia. Those Arabs! Among



*That green linen ensemble was my home in Africa
and Sicily.*

them Crosby would be Beau Brummell. If you want to go into the clothing business, get a few mattress covers, cut arm-holes in them, and sell them for \$20 apiece to the Arabs. You'll be Hart, Schaffner, and Marx and Bergdorf Goodman all rolled into one.

If you think they were kidding about the Casbah in that picture *Algiers*, Colonel David tried to get permission from the local police to take us through with a Military Police escort. Couldn't get the permit. They say soldiers have gone into the Casbah and never been heard from again. The police don't want to bother with that part of town at all.

We were pretty tired that evening in Algiers. And not having had any sleep since we left Prestwick, we hit the sack early. At about four in the morning I was awakened by sirens screaming. I heard someone hollering, "Out with the lights! Out with the lights!"

I'd been sleeping so soundly that this all confused me for a minute. Then all of a sudden I got it. An air raid! Langford's room was a couple of doors down and across the hallway. So I popped out of bed, pulled the covers around me, and got there in three seconds without opening any of the doors.

I pounded and screamed, "Frances! Get up! This is it!" It seemed like an hour that I stood there pounding and hollering, "This is it!"

Finally from the other side of the door Frances asked sleepily, "This is what?"

Just as she asked that, the all-clear sounded.

"This is the guy who woke you up for nothing," I said foolishly and went back to bed trailing my sheets behind me. I looked just like an Arab. Maybe that's why they dress the way they do. When they get out of bed in the morning they don't bother to take off the sheet.

The next day, which was a Saturday, we arrived in Tunis, and who do I find doing a dispatching job for the Air Transport Command but Lieutenant Bruce Cabot. And bang! I'm back in Hollywood.

The Army had gotten us rooms at the Hôtel Transatlantique. We were on the fourth floor. There was no elevator. I had a lovely little closet overlooking a moth. The room was so small that every time someone turned the doorknob he

rearranged the furniture. There was no soap and no light. And the ceiling was so low the mice were born round-shouldered. The British, you see, had gotten to Tunis first and taken all the best hotels.

I think that was one of the incentives that sent the Americans whipping through Sicily so fast. They wanted to get to the better hotels before the British did.

Right after dinner we went over to the Red Cross Club and did two big shows for the men who were able to get into Tunis that Saturday evening. The Red Cross Club is to Tunis what the Stage Door Canteen is to many a big city here at home.

Tunis at that time was operational headquarters for all the bomber and fighter groups that were working on Sicily. So there were plenty of fliers in the audience. And they were certainly glad to see me. They gave me a real Air Force welcome. As soon as I walked out they stuck their tongues between their lips and made a noise like an airplane. I said to the guy in charge, "It isn't every day that you get a great movie star to work in this canteen."

"No," he said, "but we keep hoping one will show up."

The next day was Sunday, and we were all invited out to Major General Jimmy Doolittle's place. He really made us feel at home. Soon as we arrived he opened up a bottle of brandy Olsen and Johnson had just sent him. He even gave us some. And when it comes to the comedy business, the General can sure hold his own telling dialect stories. We had a lot of laughs together, and he told us one interesting story about a visit from Churchill. The Premier was interested in the speed with which we got reconnaissance pictures after a bombing raid. Doolittle told him, "We just get in a plane, run over behind the bombers, and have the pictures back in no time."

Churchill wanted to know where they were going the next day. When they told him he said he'd like to see the pictures

but that he had to go on to Malta; would they be good enough to send the finished pictures down there to him. Doolittle said, "Sure!" He said they'd go out in the morning and have the pictures on their way by three thirty P.M.

That was the first time the bombers were forced to drop their bombs short of the target, and a communiqué had to be sent saying, "Sorry, Mr. C., no pictures."

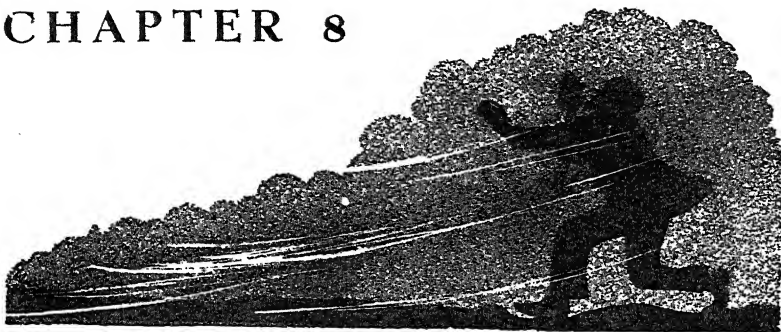
While we were having dinner that Sunday at Doolittle's, his aide, Brigadier General Bourne, received a wire with the results of the day's mission. I was sitting next to him. His face sort of lit up and he said, "This is our day today, boys. They did it to Naples. Had a perfect thing!"

Then he turned to me and touched the gray hairs at his temples. "I get these from the missions that go sour. When they don't come back I figure I sent them the wrong way." General Bourne's a big guy, about forty, and an ex-Army football player. He and Jimmy sit around figuring out fancy football plays to get those bombers over a target and away free before they can be thrown for a loss.

Too often for the Army's comfort Jimmy Doolittle goes along on bombing missions to see how we make out. He told us a story about a mission over Sardinia. He was riding in one of the bombers and the target was all smoked over. They circled and circled, but couldn't find it. The flak was rising thicker and thicker, and there didn't seem to be much chance of ever completing the mission, so the pilot who was handling the plane Jimmy was riding in said, "General, this stuff's pretty bad. I think we'd better start back."

Doolittle said, "Hurry, son. I've been thinking that same thing for half an hour."

CHAPTER 8



Blood and Sand—Both Real

ONE of the things I was most interested in finding out from Jimmy Doolittle was what Rommel was doing after we drove him out of North Africa. This was back in August, 1943. So, instead of hinting around, I asked Jimmy point-blank what he thought had become of Rommel.

"Can you keep a secret?" he asked. I nodded.

"Follow me," he said.

He led me out of the house, through the garden, and behind a clump of bushes I don't know the name of, but they're like a clump of bushes in my yard in San Fernando Valley. We stopped. Jimmy looked around. I could almost hear my own heart pounding with excitement. I was about to get a hot hunk of military intelligence. I'd probably be one of the few guys in the whole world who knew what Rommel was doing.

"He's playing Erich von Stroheim in German movies," Doolittle whispered. We then walked silently back to the house.

One of the guests at Doolittle's that day was Wing Commander Griffith, of the RAF, who said he thought it would be wonderful if we could get down to Kairouan to play for about eight thousand RAF guys . . . the ones who fly those

big Wellington Bombers on the night raids over the Continent. So the USAAF flew us down to do a show for their colleagues. When we got a look at how young some of those RAF officers are we began to understand why several bars in Tunis had signs saying, "No colonel allowed in this bar unless accompanied by his mother." Some of the majors were so young they had to pin up their curls so their medals would show.

The thing that was most noticeable about that bunch was their extreme youth, and after the show a lot of them wanted to know all about Madeleine Carroll. Who wouldn't? They took us around and showed us where some of the natives were weaving those expensive oriental rugs. Again I priced one. The guy said 95,000 francs and went right back to his weaving. I probably could have argued him down to 45,000. But that's still an awful lot of dough just for the privilege of putting your foot in it.

I don't know what Tunis is like during peace times. Something like Santa Monica with Arabs, I guess. But under the conditions we saw it, you can have it. You can't walk through the streets without feeling someone is following you. Of course, when you stop to figure it out, you realize why you have that feeling. Someone always is.

The town was loaded with Nazi spies and Nazi fliers who were shot down over the desert or somewhere and were trying to get back to Germany. Those fliers carry plenty of dough with which to bribe some Arab to give them clothes. All day long on the streets of Tunis, British and American Intelligence officers were picking up these Nazis.

There didn't seem to be much of any life except military and Arab. The former were constantly on the alert. The latter were never alert.

The water front and harbor were pretty well bombed, but nothing like Bizerte. And night life in Tunis practically didn't exist. There were a few second-rate night clubs and a

couple of movie houses playing pictures from three to five years old. I saw a swell newsreel, though, of Hoover making a campaign speech. Most of the soldiers, however, had to be off the streets by nine o'clock, so they didn't have time for pictures too.



The mosquitoes around Tunis are so big they have to use landing strips.

What I'm trying to say is, the whole time you're in Tunis you feel something in the air. Some call it espionage. Some call it counterespionage. But that certain something in the air that seemed most important to me is called mosquitoes.

The mosquitoes around Tunis are so big they have to use landing strips. But I got kind of used to their biting me. What I never could get used to was seeing them pull out a bottle of Worcestershire sauce. The flies in North Africa aren't bad either. They are unquestionably the bravest flies in the world. Nothing disturbs them. They walk all over your nose and your lips. If you try to blow them off, they blow back at you. Must have been these flies in Tunis that inspired the song "Shoo Shoo, Baby."

One of the first things I noticed as we flew into Tunis and as we drove from base to base was the terrific concentration of farm machinery. It may seem strange that I can even recognize farm machinery, being a city boy. But you've got to stop and consider how much corn I've produced. There were tractors, plows, rollers, and disk harrows. Nothing, however, seemed to be under cultivation or growing.

Then I discovered that wherever there was a large concentration of farm machinery, a nice landing strip suddenly appeared. Every one of those landing strips is a little piece of the road to Berlin. "Road to Berlin"? Do you suppose Crosby will still be strong enough to make one called that?

We stopped to talk to some of the guys who were making one of these landing strips. One of their officers said, "When these boys heard you were in the neighborhood, they were so anxious to see you they didn't leave a stone unturned."

I said to the Lieutenant, "I sent word ahead that they shouldn't go to any trouble."

He said, "We told them that, but they kept turning stones and looking for you anyway."

In Africa they're even more secretive than in England. Remember that picture called *Africa Speaks*? It doesn't. If you ask a soldier a question, he turns away. You begin to feel like a commercial for Lifebuoy Soap. I said to one soldier, "How many men around Tunis?" He said, "Oh, somewhere between . . . maybe more, maybe a few less."

I said, "How many planes are dispersed in this area?"

He said, "More and more."

I said, "Are they mostly fighters or bombers?"

He said, "Definitely!"

Then he took my arm and said, "I've got to put you in the stockade."

I said, "Why?"

He said, "You know too much."

We did a show for a P-38 Fighter group just outside Tunis, and after it was over a guy came up to me and said, "How's everybody back at Lakeside? How are Bing and Menjou and Guy Kibbee?" It was Al Barber, who used to caddy there. Now he's a lieutenant in the Air Force.

He was wearing the Purple Heart. I got a big kick out of that—seeing this kid who used to carry my bag on the golf course doing such a potent job. When he comes back I'll be glad to carry his bag from the station. I had a wonderful time at that base with Al. I never knew I could sign so many autographs. I felt I was the luckiest man in the world. I came out three fountain pens ahead.

It was at this base that Captain Bud Ross (I understand he's now a major) took me up in a P-38. They're made for only one person, so I kind of rode piggy-back. Those things really travel. Just for fun I decided to spit down at the ground. Ross should have told me we were flying upside down.

He went into a dive so steep the instruments couldn't record our speed. It's the only dive I was ever anxious to get out of. On top of that he started stunting with me, but we got our signals crossed. Ross did an inside turn while my stomach was doing an outside loop. Things didn't seem to be going right after that. I've done enough flying to know when a pilot's in trouble. I didn't want to show my nervousness, but I couldn't help saying, "Do you mind if I bite my nails?" Ross said, "No! Go right ahead. Anything to make you stop biting mine."



*Ross should have told me we were flying
upside down.*

It was right after that he made a forced landing. I forced him.

The rations situation sometimes got pretty rugged around Tunis till I found that one of my neighbors in the Hôtel Transatlantique was a mess sergeant. I've played enough service spots to know those guys are good friends to have. So we got acquainted. I beefed to him about not being able to get any fresh milk. There was some sort of embargo on milk, and I like a glass of milk before going to sleep. He said, "I can get you all you want."

"Get it, boy," I said, "and my regards to the cow."

That evening the Sarge showed up with a quart.

"This tastes kind of funny. What's wrong?" I asked.

"Nothing's wrong," he said. "It's the best goat's milk in the world."

Goat's milk is a taste you have to acquire. But once you do,

you're all set. You feel great! It's loaded with vitamins. After a couple of glasses of goat's milk you feel like going out and running a race for Crosby.



Goat's milk is a taste you have to acquire.

One day the Sergeant told me he'd located a Brooklyn woman who'd lived outside Tunis for over twelve years.

"Long way to go to get a bet on the Dodgers," I said.

The Sergeant said, "She has some real cow's milk."

"How far to this Canarsie creamery?"

"About three miles."

"What are we waiting for?" I said. So we hopped into a jeep and went out there. The Sarge forgot to tell me it was three miles straight up a hill. The Sergeant knocked on the door, it was opened a crack, and a woman's voice said, "What do you want?"

"It's okay," said the Sarge. "You know me."

"Oh, yeah. Come on in, Joe."

The dame opened the door, let us into a kitchen, and poured us some bootleg milk. It was great. Better than the gin we used to get . . . more of a kick. I got to talking to the woman and asked her what part of Brooklyn she was from.

"Where do you get that Brooklyn stuff," she said. "I'm from Ninety-sixth Street and Riverside Drive. Ran a speak-easy there, too."

It seemed no matter where we went or whom we played for, someone turned up from home. We went out to play for about seven thousand Tank Corps men. Those Tankers are a rugged bunch of boys. I said to a guy named Canon from Kentucky, "It gets pretty warm inside one of those kettles out on the desert, doesn't it?" He just smiled and the steam came pouring out of his ears.

But they got out of their tanks to watch the show. Of course I sang "Tanks for the Memory," and they booed me to the echo. Then the echo did some booing on its own. It was a beautiful sight the way those men looked, all stacked up the side of a hill. As we started the show I recognized a kid right down in front that I used to see all the time in Hollywood. He was the last person I expected to find in Africa. He was a kid who always used to be hanging around whatever broadcasting studio I was working in, always wanting to get in, always asking for tickets. I used to have to brush him out of the way to get in anywhere.

I waved to him and hollered, "Hiya! Glad to see you. How are you?"

He just gave me a light brush with "Hi, Bob."

"How's everything?" I said.

He just smiled and said, "I got in here by myself."

It was his moment of triumph, and he was entitled to it.

That turned out to be a "great" show. I told my first two jokes, and the mike went dead. I tried to yell the gags,

but that never works. So Jack and Tony and Frances and I dragged out a few of our dances and pantomime stuff. Then they got ready to drag us out. We laid a sort of Denver sandwich.

Those Tank guys were nice to us. Even though the show went a little sour they let us eat with them. We ate with the enlisted men. What food those guys had! And I don't mean only what quantities, I also mean what quality. And do they grab for it. I couldn't understand why they didn't give the boys napkins. After one meal with them I found out they ate so fast the suction took the fuzz right off them. I saw one soldier eating with his fingers. I said, "Didn't they give you a knife and fork?"

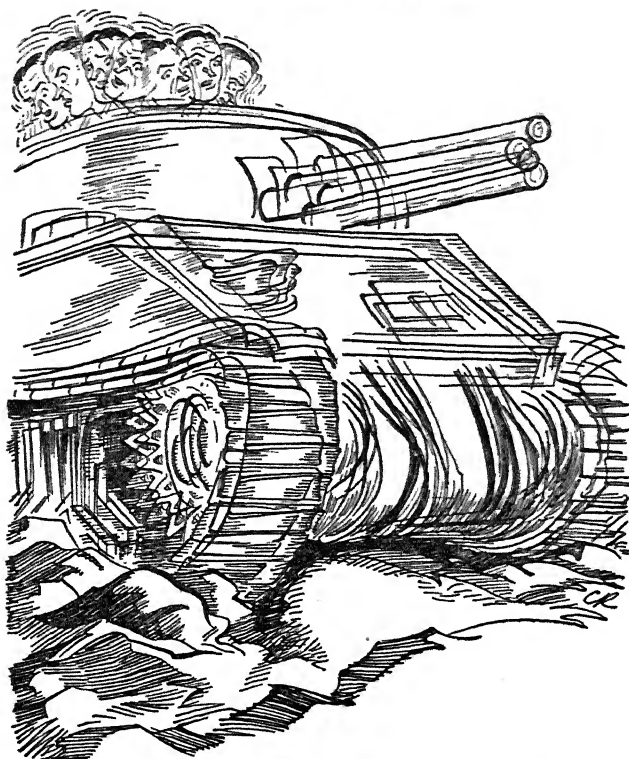
"Yes," he answered, "and they were delicious."

After lunch they took me for a ride in one of their iron-covered jeeps with muscles. I should have ridden *before* lunch. Now I know what an ice cube feels like in a cocktail shaker.

I asked the guys if it was always so hot around Tunis. I was thinking how our jokes had laid fried eggs . . . over easy and basted. They told me it was usually hotter, and always so dry that when a private and an officer met, they had to oil each other's elbows before they could salute.

And it wasn't only around Tunis that the sun worked overtime. We got word from Cairo that Jack Benny had been there, and they said he arrived looking like Fred Allen and left looking like Rochester. But no matter what he looked like, some of the fliers I talked to around Tunis say that Jack really rocked them in that area. I'm glad we were booked on different circuits. I'd hate to have to follow Jack Benny in spots where the audience carries live ammunition.

But it's not only guys like Jack Benny and Joe E. Brown and Al Jolson that the men love to see. They go for Frankie Conville, Harry Barris, and all the other wonderful performers who are trooping around the world to entertain service men and gals.



Now I know what an ice cube feels like in a cocktail shaker.

Think, for instance, of guys like Kay Kyser and his great crew. He never plays a dance date or a theater. He's on the road playing for soldiers, sailors, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen all the time . . . and it's not easy for Kay, either.

But to get back to North Africa: they've got a certain kind of hot wind that should come out of Louis Armstrong's trumpet. It's called the sirocco, and it's terrible: The dust blew around so, even the vultures wore goggles. When one of those heavy Sahara sandstorms came along it was so hard to see you had to go to bed by instruments.

Of course that dust flying around was tough on Langford.

She was always worrying about how her hair was. She wanted to look as glamorous as possible for the men . . . and she managed.

Frances really looked great in her light slacks and bare midriff. Come to think of it, why was she always worried about her hair-do? Who ever looked at it? Finally she hit on a scheme of putting all her hair under a big bandanna, just leaving one swirl out on top over the bandanna to simulate an up-do. Don't I sound like Pierre?

If she didn't do that the dust would get into her hair, and the heat of the African sun would soon turn the dust to mud. A mud-pack is good. But not for the scalp. Just a few days on that North African desert and you know exactly what a dust storm is. It's when the terra is no longer firma.

It takes you a while to get used to the short water rations. But the men don't seem to mind. They were especially trained for that sort of thing. It's marvelous, too, how the Army has always been able to find men perfectly suited for every job. Over in Africa they had Crosby's jockeys teaching the G.I.s how to go ten days without food and water.

Naturally, there were plenty of hospitals around Tunis, and we played as many as they'd let us into. In one of them we saw a guy in a complete parka made out of plaster. That flier was in one of the biggest casts since they tore down the old Hippodrome. The cast covered his head and body right down to his waist.

John Steinbeck wrote, "Probably the most difficult, the most tearing thing of all, is to be funny in a hospital." In a way he's right. But, on the other hand, it's much harder not to be.

Those guys aren't asking for tears or sympathy. They had a job to do, and they did it. It was a tough job. But they *did* do it.

What right would I have coming in on a bunch of men who had successfully carried out their mission, to meet the

enemy and hold him, and not be able to carry out mine—the job of passing out a few snickers.

And it really isn't laughs they want so much. It's just somebody to talk to about something that's closest to their hearts. Nurses and doctors haven't time to listen. Writing letters is tough to do sometimes because they really haven't anything they're willing to say. Their buddies have their own little things to talk about and make lousy listeners.

I come along, they know my kisser, they know my voice—and they know most of my jokes. So I don't have to bother with those. I just tell them, "Yeah. I've been in St. Paul. Great town." That's all I have to say. They take it from there. Believe me, I've learned one wonderful thing, talking to men in hospitals. I've learned how to listen. That's a knack not many guys in show business ever acquire. And I've also learned how to let myself get topped.

Maybe you don't know it, but a comedian who allows himself to be topped without trying to fight back could be a gone comic. Or maybe you don't know what "being topped" means. That's when someone says something funny to you and you don't try to top it by saying something you think is funnier.

For example, a guy says to me, "Flying over here from England it was so foggy even the sea gulls were on instruments."

The topper might be, "Think that's something? When I came over even the instruments were flying on instruments."

Whether or not that's very funny isn't the point. It's the technique of the topper.

That guy in the all-over plaster cast topped me . . . and of all people to be topped by, a guy who's plastered.

In the first place he had me topped in courage before I opened my kisser. But ask yourself what you'd say to a living mummy, even though you know he's going to be well and walk around again someday, when you also know what he's gone through and you doubt if you could have taken it.

For me to talk to that man at all took more than courage. It took downright gall. Fortunately, you don't stop to think of all those things when you're touring the wards. I just got a gander at this guy and said, "How do you get a razor in there?"

Nice crack, huh?

He didn't mind. I guess he smiled, if I could have seen it. He must have. Because what he said was, "I've *had* my close shave, Bob."

There may be a topper to that. But who wants it?

Just about the last base we played before leaving Tunis for Bizerte was Major Bob Bassler's outfit. They were a Fighter group who flew P-40s. Bob came down to Tunis and picked us all up in a B-25 they were using for transport purposes. Besides our party there was a beautiful Red Cross gal named Hildegarde. She told us her brother's the guy who makes those special low, snappy automobile bodies the actors around Hollywood like to have on their cars. They call them Darrin Bodies. The reason I don't have one on my car is that I don't want my car to look any lower or any snappier than I do. Just a matter of pride.

While we were flying down to the base in that B-25 with its guns all loaded for action, I asked Bob if I could crawl up into the greenhouse in the nose and fire one of the 50-caliber machine guns. It takes quite a lot of skill to hit a target with one of these guns, but I did all right. I really got the lead out. I fired three bursts and every one of them went right into the target—the Mediterranean.

Great group of men that Bassler had. He looks like Gary Cooper and really is sort of the Sergeant York of the P-40s. At the time we passed through, he had five planes to his credit—and you could tell he'd get plenty more.

When we got to the base it was all tents and one Quonset Hut for the officers. In case you don't know, a Quonset Hut is a fox-hole upside down. Bob introduced us to his aide, Cap-

tain Watkins, and we went to their tent to relax a little. There were half a dozen or so officers sitting around, and one guy said all he wanted was to get home for about three days and stretch his legs under a table full of his mother's cooking.

Major Bassler said, "Yeah, that would be nice, but I don't even want to take any time out for that. All I want to do is to beat these Nazi sons-of-bitches so we can get at those little Jap bastards and finish this thing as fast as possible."

That wasn't a Senator making a patriotic speech. That wasn't an officer on the radio selling war bonds. That was one fighter pilot talking to a lot of other fighter pilots who knew what he meant.

Before the show started they told us that for about four weeks their outfit and a Fighter group of P-38s over the hill had been buzzing each other regularly. The P-38s had nothing much else to do when they weren't fighting, and it blew off a lot of steam. They'd come zooming down to within forty or fifty feet of the tents just for the hell of it.

But Captain Watkins told me that a couple of days before the Colonel of the P-38s group had phoned Watkins, who happened to be Officer of the Day, and suggested calling off the buzzing. Watkins, according to Watkins, had handled the situation masterfully. "Okay," he reported himself as saying to the Colonel, "if you want to call it off, it's okay with us."

Major Bassler said that was fine, as buzzing might hurt our show.

We planned to finish with the presentation of some Purple Heart awards to members of the group. Frances was going to make the awards and kiss each guy. We figured this topped any French General in the last war.

When the show started and I read the name of the first kid who'd been given the Purple Heart I never heard such a roar of approval in my life. And remember again, that wasn't a bunch of civilians applauding a soldier who'd done something. Each of them knew exactly what that kid had done,

and shouted his approval the way high-school kids do when the little quarterback gets a bloody nose but goes on playing.

When Langford kissed him there was another yelp that I was afraid would bring the Jerries over. Just as I was announcing the name of the second kid to get the Purple Heart, someone hollered, "Here they come!" It was the boys in the P-38s. They knew we were doing a show, and they were just returning from a mission over Sicily. They were looking for some relaxation, too. After the second one buzzed us, I hollered, "Hey, Watkins! I thought you fixed this!"

They were killing the gags great. Every time one came zooming down I had to ad lib something. I'd scream, "Watkins, do something! Call the Colonel!" Then I'd make believe I was scared. Make believe I wasn't! Those guys came down so close their landing gears were giving me a sixty-second workout.

When we came to the last kid to get the Purple Heart, some of the boys in the audience yelled, "Ask him where he was wounded!" So without any thought I did. He blushed like a schoolgirl and said, with great dignity, "I'd rather not discuss the matter." He'd been wounded, as so many fighter pilots are, up through the bottom of the plane. Imagine those fliers laughing at that. I don't think it's funny to get hit even there.

Another thing Major Bob Bassler did for us. He told us and let us see for ourselves how the flight surgeons operate around and among a Fighter group. Those flight surgeons are sort of the house mothers of the outfit. But they've got to be careful not to let the men know how carefully they're being taken care of. They'll watch a man for a couple of days, if they see him acting funny, or shaking a little. And if they're convinced he's got a touch of nerves, they stop him, look down his throat, and put him to bed with the flu. Or send him away for a few days to get over a touch of fever. Great stuff!

When I returned home I received a letter from a kid saying:

While you were in North Africa you visited a fighter squadron of which my brother was one of the pilots. He wrote that Frances Langford gave four of the pilots the Purple Heart and also a kiss. He says that after the performance you got into a crap game and my brother won \$20 from you. And man, oh man, he couldn't get over that . . . playing crap with Bob Hope.



Wait till he tries to cash my check.

Found a sucker; didn't he? Wait till he tries to cash my check.

After the crap game Bassler loaned me some dough and

ferried us to our next stop, a medium bomber base, in a B-26 Marauder he was returning there. Our fliers had a lot of respect for that B-26 (even though they called it "The Flying Prostitute"—no visible means of support). They've pulled their weight fighting this war. They're a very hot ship: take off fast, land fast, and are tough to get out of. It was even tough to get me into it.

Colonel Charles Austin was C.O. at this spot, and they featured what they called "night clubs." They had four of them, made out of the boxes that fragmentation bombs come in. Each spot was named for a different famous New York night club: Stork Club, "21," El Morocco, and Copacabana. They kept the bars in each well stocked with stuff they'd ferry down from Cairo.

After the show we made a tour of the "night clubs." Doing this a man could get fractured very fast. We were in the fourth of the four "clubs" when I said to the Colonel, "How about taking me on a mission with you tomorrow?"

The Colonel winked and said, "I'm your man. It might get a little rough, though!"

Imagine him trying to scare me. I never even listened to him. I was unconscious.

We had a few more Scotch and sodas on our coming mission. I felt great. Soda relaxes me so. Then the Colonel excused himself for a little while, and when he came back I could feel the bristles of the brush dusting the back of my neck. "Get some sleep, son," he said.

I told him I didn't need sleep. I'd seen *Dawn Patrol* and knew how fliers ought to act.

Colonel Austin patted my back and said, "I don't think you'll be able to make it this trip. The General phoned and said to put down the glasses and get to bed."

But before the Colonel got to bed he drove us forty miles back to Tunis over the worst roads in the world.

That mission over Italy sure would have been wonderful

to tell my kids about. Now I'm really sore they didn't take me. It was a milk run, and I'm fond of milk.

Before we moved on down to Bizerte, we ran out to see General Doolittle again. He was very cordial. As we entered the room he jumped up and said, "Glad to see you, Mr. Benny!"

I said, "I didn't think you'd remember me, General Spaatz."

Jimmy then said he'd heard some nice things about the morale work we were doing. I began to think he really did mean Jack Benny.

And the Benny thing turned into a running gag. Doolittle's cook baked a great big cake specially for me. It said on it: "Welcome, Jack Benny." It worried me—I thought the trip must have aged me. Later the cook came to me and apologized and said he hoped I wasn't hurt.

I told him the billing didn't change the flavor, and he gave me a souvenir . . . a German ack-ack medal. I think he did other things besides cook.

CHAPTER 9



Heavy, Heavy Hangs Over Our Heads

I THOUGHT we'd skirt the coast from Tunis to Bizerte. But it seems that hunk of North African coast features marshes. So we went inland and skirted the marshes or something. Whatever it was we skirted, believe me, that was one skirt I could have gotten along better without.

In Bizerte we met a few German medium bombers and Hal Block. We were scheduled to go on the air from Algiers, and Block had flown down from London to help us broadcast. The medium bombers had flown down from Berlin to help broadcast us.

I don't mind telling you I don't care for my bombing medium. And I don't like it well done either. I've gone up against both. And if I must have bombing, I want it rare—the rarer the better.

We'd have been as lost as four babes in the wood around Tunis without Captain Mike Cullen, of Army Special Service. Mike had gotten his training handling hams as manager of all the Loew theaters between Columbus, Ohio, and Kansas City. If we hadn't had Mike to shepherd us around Bizerte, we'd have been four badly upset actors. Mike took care of us with the ease and solicitousness of a wise and slightly

indulgent parent. And, like children grown up, it's only in retrospect that we really appreciate his care.

We also picked up another addition to our party in Tunis, a photographer loaned to us by the Twelfth Air Force. He happened to be a lieutenant named Eddie Coe, whose folks lived right around the corner from my folks in Cleveland. Well, not exactly right around the corner. Right across the tracks—on the right side.

About two thirds of a roundabout way from Tunis to Bizerte is the little town of Mateur. I call it a little town, because when we got there there was only a little left of it. Mateur had been an Axis strong point when the First Infantry had been coming through, and their artillery support plus some hearty co-operation from the Air Force had changed Mateur from victor to vanquished. Mateur, when we saw it, was a beautiful hunk of rubbish.

But it was in Mateur that I ate one of the best meals I'd had the whole time I was on the action side of the Atlantic. This was at the Ninety-sixth Bakery, where they turn out loaves of bread the way Henry J. Kaiser bats out Victory Ships. There are a bunch of hard-boiled bakers in that joint who are going to be a wonderful catch for some lucky riveters.

Captain Herbert Ernest, who ran the spot, threw together a little meal for us . . . a light snack with such standout attractions as porterhouse steak, a tossed green salad, hot Parker House rolls, and pie à-la-mode. Just rough, wholesome, soldier fare. I'd have had a hard time doing as well at his father's spot. His dad runs the dining rooms at the Hotel Commodore in New York. The men really ate well at that Bakery. But not as well after we left as before we arrived. Of course, that sort of laying out of food was a tribute to any visitor from home.

Wherever we went we either were given the works as far as victuals were concerned or else we were given to understand that "no fuss had been made for us . . . that we were just tak-

ing potluck." The potluck was great. I'd have appreciated some of that luck when I didn't have a pot.

After lunch we went on to do our first show at Ferryville. This is a town sort of around the bay from Bizerte. It lies in about the same relative position that Bay Meadows does to San Francisco, or that Yonkers does to New York, or Gary, Indiana, to Chicago. If you happen to live in Council Bluffs you're on your own.

At Ferryville we did a show for about seventy-five hundred guys and gals. It was the most mixed audience we played to, except in a theater. All kinds of uniforms were there—soldiers, sailors, WACS—about the only fighting uniform not represented was the Brooklyn Dodgers.

Just as I stepped up to the microphone to start the show, a light tank came shoving through the crowd like a fat woman making for a seat in a crowded subway car. People gave way in all directions. A tank commands plenty of respect. I thought it was out of control. It looked as if the thing was going to mow us right down, and I was getting ready to jump off the platform when suddenly, right in front of me, it stopped.

The top flew open and a guy crawled out wearing a tank-er's crash helmet and enough grease on his face to sing "Mammy." He was dragging a folding chair which he set up on top of the tank. He sat down, crossed his legs, smiled, waved to me, and said, "Start the show."

When I started in vaudeville I went from one tank to another. This was the first time a tank ever came to me.

So the show began. About halfway through my opening routine the guy on the tank hollers, "Hey, Bob! Why is a Jap like your girdle?"

When I'm working for the Army I'm a straight man. So I stopped what I was doing and said, "I don't know, Mac, why is a Jap like my girdle?"

The kid hollered back, "Because it creeps up on you and it

takes a Yank to bring it down." He got a nice laugh. It was a good joke, and I'd never heard it before.

Later someone told me Eddie Cantor had done it on the air. Can you imagine me liking a joke from that other tooth paste?

From Ferryville we were ferried across Lake Bizerte by the Navy to have dinner with Commander Patterson at the Bizerte Naval Base. It was a wonderful ride. After all the heat and dust of the desert, being out on the water was like heaven. We were riding in a very fast little Navy craft, and they let me steer it part of the time. The spray was shooting way over my head. I looked up into the spray and there were fish looking down at me. So we slowed up.

I began waving to the boys on the LSTs and LCIs in the harbor. They hollered back and waved. We tossed a few bons mots at each other. None of us knew that those guys were going to be the target that night.

Commander Patterson turned out to be a swell host. He told us to take anything we wanted and what we didn't see to ask for. The first thing we took was a bath.

Our unit wasn't scheduled to play his Naval Base at all, but even before dinner we'd agreed that we had to squeeze it into our schedule somehow.

I suppose it's anti-Emily Post for a guest to mention this, but Commander Patterson served us exactly the same meal we'd had at the Bakery that noon. But, of course, we couldn't be rude, so we ate it. In fact, we were so afraid he'd think we were rude we each had second helpings.

It turned out that the mess officer there was the ex-football star, Lieutenant Bob Peoples, once U.S.C., now U.S.N.R. He was glad to see us and vice versa. Commander Patterson couldn't say enough about him, and I don't mean about his cooking. The Commander told us that when they first landed, Bob Peoples worked steadily, was actually on his feet, for over thirty-six hours. That's a long time to stand in a hot kitchen. Ask any bride.

After dinner we did a show in Bizerte for about ten thousand guys. They picked out a nice spot for it, too. In an orchard over an ammunition dump. But the show went great and we all felt marvelous with two wonderful meals under our belts. All we looked forward to was a little relaxation and a good night's sleep. So right after the show we headed for the Hôtel Transatlantique in Bizerte. I wish I could tell you my reaction when I saw that hotel. I wish I could remember if I had a reaction.

But, really, we'd become used to battered-down things, and Bizerte was really battered down. I went to my room, looked through the walls for a while at the moon on Lake Bizerte, and then went up on the roof for a little relaxation. When we got up there we sat and smoked and talked for a while, and then I began to "imagine" I heard planes. Which brings you right to the point where you came in, if you started at the beginning of this chalk-talk. If you came in late, this is where you cut back to the first chapter and stay with it until I get upset by Stukas and lost in contemplation of the trip and the mosquitoes. If you don't want to do that, just take my word for it, there were Stukas and mosquitoes and it was a bad night.

The next morning Captain Cullen and I had a consultation about getting a place a little farther out of town . . . a little back from the harbor where the bombers wouldn't come "peepin' into where I'm sleepin'." We then talked it over with Captain Bates, the Special Service officer in Bizerte, and he said, "Why, Colonel Blesse wants you to come up to the Fifty-sixth Evacuation Hospital and stay with him."

A hospital sounded good to me. They have beds there. And nurses. Captain Bates said it was about three miles up in the hills and that made it sound even better. So we moved up to the hospital.

Colonel Blesse was wonderful. Those Blesse boys are doing all right in the Medical Corps. His brother is General

Blesse, head of the whole medical setup in that theater of operations. First I had to argue with the Colonel about giving me his bed. He wanted to. For some reason I didn't want him to. So he finally brought another big bed into his room for me. I don't know why he didn't trust me . . . insisted I room with him. Frances, Tony, and Jack each had a single room. It was a relief and a pleasant surprise after that hotel in Bizerte, and it sent us out to our next camp freshened up.

The first thing we found out was that around Bizerte an American woman was even more of a novelty than around Tunis. There was one little village where about three thousand soldiers were stationed. There were two girls in the town. They both looked like Mrs. Frankenstein, but they had more dates than Hedy Lamarr. On Saturday nights the guys had to synchronize their watches. To make things fair the girls split the guys between them and gave each one a date. One soldier was worried. He was afraid he'd be shipped out before May 12, 1948. No kidding, I walked into one camp with Frances Langford hanging from my arm. When the rush was over, my arm was hanging from Frances Langford. The respect Frances got from thousands of men was inspiring. They didn't respect me.

Naturally, this sort of thing is flattering to a woman. Frances was so flattered by the reception at one air base, she gave them one of her Nylon stockings to use as a wind-sock.



Around Bizerte an American woman was even more of a novelty than around Tunis.

In twenty minutes the field was crowded with seventy-five Navy planes, six P-38s, two Sunderland Bombers from the RAF Coastal Command, and a jeep that flew in on instruments from Cairo.

But just any babe doesn't go with those guys. There's a dame named Sally who broadcasts to our troops from Germany. Nice kid, she sounds like. She has a very pleasant voice and gives out with garbage like this: "What are you boys fighting for, anyway? The 4Fs at home are running around with your sweethearts and wives while you think you're defending your country? From what?"

It would have made this doll very proud if she'd been able to see how the men she was talking to accepted her little pep talks. They listened quietly. Nobody said a word. Then someone would get up to walk out and spit on the radio as he went by.

Another thing we heard on the radio that second day in Bizerte was that Germany was planning to blast it off the map. This slightly concerned us, particularly Block and me, because we had to write that broadcast for Algiers. Captain Cullen said we'd probably be out of danger up at the hospital but that it could get a little noisy. We told him to try to find out if there wasn't some place we could go that was a little way out of town . . . maybe in East Orange, New Jersey. He started the "chain of command" working on this job as we pulled into a B-25 Bomber base ready to go to work.

We asked the commanding Colonel what time the show was scheduled to go on. "At one fifteen," he said, "but I wish you could hold it a few minutes. Some of the boys are coming back from a mission."

We went to wait in the Colonel's tent. If anybody ever pulls that crack about the heat being in-tents, believe him it is, especially around Bizerte. Even the pup tents were panting. While we were waiting at that field a Mustang landed with its tongue hanging out.

The Colonel had a sort of a scoreboard in his tent. It showed the health and disposition of his entire command—who had been lost, who had been wounded, all kinds of vital statistics. While we all waited anxiously for the mission to return, the Colonel told us we'd be able to tell how it went by the way they came in. "If they come in high," he said, "and circle the field it means they have wounded aboard. If they buzz us, it was pretty good."

Again we tried to find out if there was any way we could watch while the men who came back were being interrogated. The Colonel said he thought he could fix it if we slipped in quietly. In about five minutes we heard the buzzing start. It was good news. The Colonel gave a shout of joy and rushed out to count the planes as they came in. He stood there in the field, the wind blowing his hair, his eyes skyward, his arms raised, screaming the count exultantly as one after another of twenty-four bombers that had started out came back.

We heard them being interrogated. They were asked all kinds of questions about antiaircraft dispersement, fighter opposition, and a hundred different details. The only trouble with the run had been that they found the target smoked up, so they'd dropped their stuff in the soot and came on home.

The day wound up at a big base hospital about twenty miles from Bizerte. There we met a major who was a friend of Abel Green of *Variety*. We were pretty bushed from the noisy, but "safe," raid of the night before. It had kept us awake . . . it, and all the other things. So, for the first time on our entire trip we hesitated when they asked us if we'd go through the wards. Not only were we tired, but we wanted to get back through Bizerte and up to the hospital where we were living before any raids started.

We held a meeting and decided we'd better play the wards even though it made us a little late getting home. That delay

may have saved our lives. We played three wards, and going through them slowed us up by about forty minutes.

We did our usual stuff going from bed to bed, shaking hands with the guys, and asking them how things were. One lad pressed a little chain bracelet into my hand and whispered he wanted me to have it and keep it. I have it. And I'm keeping it. It's swell. He made it himself, and it's one of my most cherished possessions.

I cherish it not only because he gave it to me, but because it will always be a reminder that no matter how tired you are, if there's a little more to do . . . do it. That bracelet is my memento of the extra forty minutes we spent in hospital wards. That extra forty minutes made it possible for us to watch bombs dropping on Bizerte rather than feel them dropping on Bizerte.

About twelve miles out of town the raid started. We got out of our car and watched it. They were laying it on Bizerte pretty heavy. Our antiaircraft was throwing everything but Willkie buttons at the raiders. The searchlights would pick out a bomber, and the Jerry fighters would start messing around trying to lead the lights away from the bomber. Watching from where we were, that raid had a terrible beauty.

Frances and I were standing next to our parked car. We had on helmets. I've never heard such noise. Every once in a while we'd see one of the big German planes burst into flame and come plunging down. All of a sudden the Jerries started running in on Bizerte right over our heads. It began to get pretty hot. Tony got under the car and Pepper scrambled into an ambulance. Those fat guys are always looking for a soft spot to lie down. The kid who was driving the rig said, "Gee, wait till I write home and tell them I had Bob Hope in my ambulance." Jack was afraid to tell him he wasn't Hope. The kid might have felt bad, or been embarrassed or something, or thrown him out.

The MP who was with us said if we heard a whining noise to hit the ditch. A few minutes later we heard a light whistle and he hollered, "There it is!" I don't know what I thought I was doing, but instead of just dropping where I was, I did a sort of a deceptive spin as if I were a quarterback turning to hand the ball to my left half. I followed this with another half spin in the other direction, and topped the routine with a complete pirouette the like of which had not been seen in that part of the world since they put Nijinsky away. I then dove. Even with all my fancy stuff I still beat Frances to the ditch.

A couple of seconds later the Sergeant said, "Okay. Come on out." I couldn't move. I thought I'd been hit. I could see myself standing in front of Paramount Studios on nice days with my Purple Heart pinned to my gray flannel suit. People would come up and ask me how it happened, and I'd just give a quiet, pained, "It's too terrible" sort of look and limp away.

It was a sprained ligament caused by my fantastic tactics before hitting the ditch. It was a bad routine for me under any circumstance. I'm not used to that sort of stuff in a Palm Beach suit and a tin helmet. And who likes working with a gravel ground cloth?

Pretty soon things quieted down and I was anxious to get on my Charley horse and get started. I wanted to get back to the hospital where we were living to see what had happened. The Sergeant said we ought to wait awhile, but I argued him out of it. Imagine a civilian arguing a sergeant out of anything. He was an MP, too. Finally we started. So did the raid.

By a sort of stop-go method we finally got into Bizerte. The smoke-pots were all burning and the traffic was all stalled. We stalled right next to one of the smudge-pots. Now I realized what a lemon tree goes through on a cold night. At last with the help of our MP sergeant we got through Bizerte and headed for the hospital.

On the way up we passed a house that was completely demolished. Just a pile of junk. I'd noticed this house the night before, when it was an attractive villa. I noticed it because it happened to be only about a hundred yards from the sewer we'd dived into when the planes came over on our first night in Bizerte. The destruction of that building had killed seven British officers.

We finally reached the hospital. They brought in 114 casualties that night.

Colonel Blesse told me to come on down to the receiving ward, as it was pretty bad and there might be something I could do. Captain McCauley was examining cases and assigning them to wards as they were carried in. All they'd had was first aid and they were sensational . . . both the doctors and the patients. The doctors were diagnosing injuries so quickly and certainly, sending one case to the shock ward, another to X ray, another to the operating room. And the men! Some of them were terribly hurt. But there wasn't a crack out of anyone. Those who could talk at all thanked me when I lit a cigarette for them.

I watched them running a steel needle sort of machine that detects where a man has metal in him. They also had a fluoroscope they'd maneuver over a man's arm and it would show if anything was in him. And I saw those magic little Singer sewing machines they use to sew up wounds.

Then a guy pulled aside a curtain and there were seven teams of doctors and nurses, two of each, all operating at once. What a picture! Sometimes even now, for no reason that I know of, I shut my eyes and see that scene: the glaring lights, those surgeons working so surely, the nurses helping them and other nurses running back and forth with the litter of an operating assembly line. It sounds terrible. It looked pretty grim. But lives were being saved by those men. Every one of those surgeons looked at least twelve feet tall to me.

While all this was going on, one of the doctors noticed I

was limping. I told him about my standing-sitting-standing, one-and-a-half Gaynor with a back twist into a ditch. Nevertheless, he insisted on examining my leg. It turned out I not only had a Charley horse, I also had scratched my knee. The doctor wanted me to have a dressing put on it. I told him I thought there was more important work to do, but he insisted. The tiniest scratches have to be taken care of in that country, or infection can set in. But they were nice. They put a bandage on, anyway.

I noticed the guy they detailed to bandage me up seemed a little nervous.

"How'd you get in here?" I asked.

"Drafted."

"No, I mean here in the Medical Corps."

"Drafted."

"Were you an intern?"

"Nope."

"Were you a medical student?"

"Nope."

"Well then, how did they happen to put you in the Medical Corps?"

"Screening test."

"How could that be? How could a screening test put a guy in the Medical Corps if he never had anything to do with medicine?"

"They asked me to write down who I worked for last. I put down 'Doctor Pepper' . . . and here I am."

He put on a nice bandage. But on the wrong leg.

About two thirty A.M. everything was pretty well cleaned up and we were sitting around with a few doctors drinking some of the coffee I'd been passing out all evening. A guy came in and told us a JU-88 had been shot down not far away, so Tony, Jack, and I hopped into a jeep and went to see. The doctors told me the German kids—there were five of them—were not over nineteen. Three of them were near

the plane all shot up. Two were found the next day. A British guard near the wreckage just pointed, saying, "There they are! They asked for it."

We got back to the hospital about four A.M., and about



He put on a nice bandage. But on the wrong leg.

four fifteen A.M. Jerry came over again. The ack-ack started climbing the sky, and the noise piled up. They tell me that after a while you get so you can identify the sound of each type of gun. It'll take me a little longer than most men, because it's much harder to hear under a mattress.

This raid lasted only a few minutes. It was reconnaissance following the earlier one. I don't even like it when they just come over to take photographs. The only pictures they'll ever get of me are moving pictures. I made a mental note to check Mike Cullen to find out if he'd found a nice quiet spot where we could spend an evening writing that radio program for Algiers.

The next day we continued doing shows around the Bizerte area. We were afraid the raid of the night before might make the audiences a little tough, but it was the other way. The only thing that was tough was the climate.

A lot of people have kidded me for doing jokes on the air where one lung says something to the other lung. I suppose they're right. It's silly. Obviously it couldn't happen. And jokes when they're that outlandish really aren't funny . . . they say. That's why I want you to believe me when I tell you it got so hot one August afternoon near Bizerte that when I took a deep breath one lung said to the other, "I don't know about you, Gregory, but I'm going out to buy some Unguentine."

The Bomber base we were playing was the only place in the world I've ever seen soldiers saluting each other just to keep themselves cooled off.

They were the Ninety-seventh Bomber Group. I was about five minutes into my monologue when a guy jumps up and hollers, "Hey, Bob, remember me?"

Why guys were always interrupting me I don't know. Nobody ever said a word while Frances was working. They just stood there and drooled. What respect they gave that gal!

But to get back to this interruption, I hollered back at the kid, "Who are you? I can't see you very well. The sun's in my eyes."

"I'm Smiley, the caddy from Hillcrest," he hollered back, "and I see you're still using that excuse about the sun being in your eyes."

"How do you like it here, Smiley?" I shouted.

"Man, am I in a sand trap," he hollered back. The thing began to develop into quite a routine.

I said, "Do I owe you anything?"

He said, "Naw, you were always a good loop."

"Well, I like golf," I said.

"If you like it so much why haven't you ever learned to play it?" he came back.

After the show Smiley took us around a little. We saw a bunch of guys amusing themselves by chasing kangaroo rats all over the desert. The man who caught the biggest one got a prize. One guy hollered, "I win." He was holding Tony Romano.

That evening on the way to the hospital I was wondering if Jerry'd come over again. It really didn't worry me . . . much. But it makes it too noisy to write a radio program, especially one like mine, which is always rather quiet and thoughtful.

One of the nurses was assigned to massage my leg to see if she could limber it up. I told her to let me know any time I could do as much for her. An orderly came with a message from the Colonel of the area inviting me down to his villa on the Mediterranean for a swim. I didn't know how the swimming would go. The nurse hadn't helped me that much. I was still hobbling around on a cane. I'd even had to cut a dance out of the show. It helped the show considerably.

The Colonel's house was right on the beach facing the Mediterranean. It was Malibu with adjoining ack-ack. I tried to swim, but it was no use. So the Colonel and some of his guests and Hal Block and I sat around talking show business. And trying to dope out something for that broadcast in Algiers.

The Colonel was saying the last time he'd seen me was in the Winter Garden in New York when I was playing in one of the post-Ziegfeld *Ziegfeld Follies*. I don't know whether he said he liked the show or not, because my ears were telling me I heard planes. In a couple of seconds I was sure I heard them, because a rocket gun right behind the Colonel's house let go with the kind of noise you'd never believe. In a few seconds all hell broke loose.

The JU-88s were coming in very low over the Bizerte

docks about a mile away. They were also coming in very low over our heads. Block and I got as excited and hysterical as a couple of schoolgirls seeing fireworks for the first time at a Sunday-school Fourth of July picnic. You could hear both of us screaming in high, cracked voices, "Look at that! Look over there!"

The planes were coming in very low over the water, and we were running back and forth along the central hallway of the house, first watching the ack-ack on the hills and then the planes they were shooting at. We must have looked silly with nothing on but robes and trunks. That's pretty bare to be when all that flak's being thrown up into the air and has to come down somewhere. On the other hand, a cotton undershirt isn't much protection, but on the other hand is a silly place to wear an undershirt.

It was a sucker's game we were playing, watching the raid. But somehow you can't help it. At one hospital we met a British lieutenant general with a horrible wound he was recovering from only by a medical miracle. He'd been wounded because he went out to watch a raid. He told us he'd have court-martialed any of his officers he caught doing what he did.

They brought down a German plane which looked as if it were going to land right in the Colonel's ash can. But it fell way off in the direction of Ferryville. About an hour and a half later, when things quieted down, we headed back for the hospital to see what had happened there and how Frances and Jack and Tony were. When I got back every one of the staff was pretty depressed. Their morale had really hit bottom. Two of their doctors had been killed in the raid. The casualties totaled forty.

A nurse pulled back a curtain in the operating room and I saw a boy lying there with both of his feet just ragged chunks of meat. They were shaving around the bone for an amputation. This was too much for me. I had to get into the

fresh air. So Romano, Block, Pepper and I found a jeep driven by a guy named Lieutenant Jack Craven and went to look for that plane we'd seen fall.

We bounced across country for a while and nothing happened. Pepper was so sleepy we had to haul him out of the front seat and put him in the back where he couldn't fall out.

At last we came to a spot near where we thought the plane might be. There was a sentry.

"Where's the plane that fell around here?" I asked.

He jumped in with us and said, "Go ahead. I'll show you." We went straight across unplowed fields and up a hill till the sentry said, "From here on it gets kind of rough, so get out and start walking if you want to see the plane."

"Any land mines around here?" I asked.

He just shrugged and said, "I don't know. Start walkin' and we'll find out."

We got about twenty yards from the jeep when the air raid sounded again. Block stood there looking like a guy who's just missed the last bus from Pomona and said, "What do we do now?"

I said I thought we ought to cut out for Ferryville and put Bizerte as far behind us as possible. Block said, "Okay!" and told the driver to step on it. He did. We kept passing jack rabbits and piles and piles of ammunition. They spread it all over the desert so there won't be any fatal concentration.

Finally we came to an Italian prison camp.

"Let's stop here," said Tony. You know how clannish those Italians are.

Jack said, "Yeah. Let's stop here."

I said, "No. The Heinies might enjoy dropping an egg or two on their Italian buddies." So we kept going.

Pretty soon the driver turned into a field and said, "Here's where we stop. This looks like a good place." That was official.

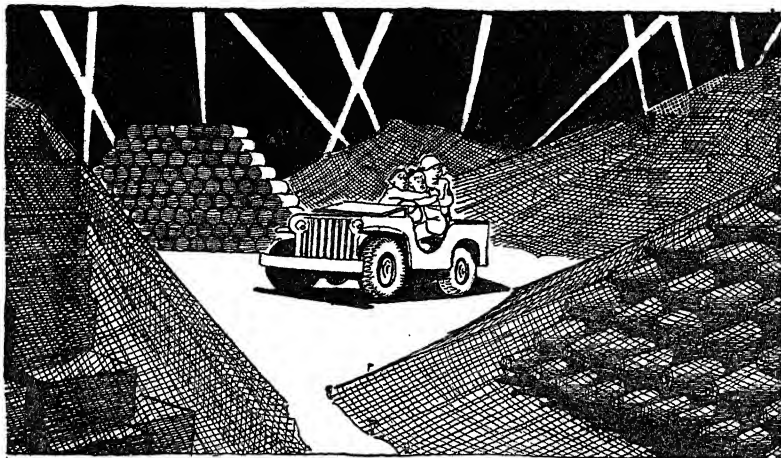
He said, "If they start diving, get under the jeep."

We sat there for about twenty minutes wondering what was going to happen when all of a sudden lights went on all around us. We were parked in the middle of an enormous ammunition dump.

We headed back for the hospital and forgot about the fallen plane. But we figured, the raid being over, we might get a little work done on the broadcast. So as soon as we got back Block and I started to talk it over. Then they came over again. It wasn't much more than to buzz us. But it was enough. I made another note to buzz Cullen about getting us a spot out of Bizerte where we could work.

The next morning we did our show for the personnel and patients of the 56th Evacuation Hospital, which was where we lived. After seeing all the grim work of the past couple of days I figured we'd lay an ostrich egg. But we went right into the thing as if nothing had happened, and they were a great audience.

We were doing our usual routine, but somehow or other I couldn't escape what I'd seen around the hospital and I got into a long thing about how wonderful the doctors and



We were parked in the middle of an enormous ammunition dump.

nurses acted. I was going great, really trying to express how magnificent I thought the medical people were. Then from way in the back a kid in a wheel chair hollered, "How about the patients?"

Naturally, he was right. No group of men is ever going to top in spirit and courage the kids from the streets of American cities, from American farms and factories, Sunday-school rooms, poolrooms, shipping rooms, and business offices. Their ability to take it really rocked German soldiers back on their heels. They'd been taught that American youth was weak, that American youth was selfish, that American youth hadn't had the training that made supermen out of the Nazis.

What American youth had that nobody in Germany thought to mention was independence, pride, and self-confidence. Those three things were winning for us every place I went in the summer of 1943.

Another wonderful thing about our Army, it never forgets its dignity. I don't mean that a bunch of soldiers on leave don't often act like a bunch of clowns or even a bunch of hoodlums. Anybody who's lived near any kind of American military installation knows that our uniformed forces seldom behave like professors on a sabbatical. But every private soldier also realizes that he's Mister Citizen.

I don't think mothers have to worry about their sons' being made into toughies. Those guys may learn G.I. ways of eating, sleeping, and killing, they may sling G.I. jargon around till the homefolks think they're listening to another language, but deep down inside, the man in uniform never loses sight of his real self because each one of them knows he's going to go back to it.

So if you've got anyone who's a soldier, or in any of the services, don't worry about his spiritual and ethical well-being. The service of his country won't do anything to his spirit, or his morals, that wouldn't have happened under some other circumstance. The boy who's going to turn out bad will find a way. The one who won't be bad can't be

tempted. The old saying that one bad apple spoils the whole barrel is perfectly true. But our soldiers don't happen to be apples. They're more like eggs . . . good eggs. And, like eggs, they're wrapped in one of the best packages in the world, the American's courage of his convictions.

If your son on leave says, "I'm just a soldier," don't worry. In order to be a good soldier and live with the rest of his buddies he's got to take that attitude. He's got to talk tough and act rough. They're all—all seven and a half million of them—playing a terrible game of pretend. Sometimes in hospitals you find the toughest of them too tired to keep up the game. One kid I talked to had been in some pretty rugged spots, spent many a month just sitting in a fox-hole.

"Didn't you find all that time in fox-holes pretty dull?" I asked him.

"No, it's wonderful," he said. "It's exciting. Plenty of action. Just think, plenty of different cloud formations every day."

There's a kid who was fighting his war with a sense of humor.

It would be possible to save what's running through my mind at this point for the end of the book. That would be showmanship. In show business it's never failed, to finish with the flag waving. But it's right now, while I feel it most, that I want to thank every soldier, sailor, Marine, Coast Guardsman, nurse, WAVE, WAC, and SPAR I saw on duty, in action, and in hospitals for what they showed me there was to learn about stamina, courage, and the important things in life.

After the show was over we were dancing with the nurses, and Frances was dancing with the doctors and patients, and they were kidding me about my hair. It was almost as long as Frances'. Only they claimed my hair was a menace to health. At one bomber base we played, a fire control crew tried to cut a firebreak from ear to ear.

My long hair had been commented on so much I was re-

mind of the kid in the hospital in New Orleans. He was in the critical ward. He looked at me and said, "You make a lot of money, don't you?" I was kind of embarrassed. I didn't



They were kidding me about my hair.

know how the boy meant it. I just mumbled something about money not being important. He didn't pay any attention to me, went right on talking. "You make a lot of money. Why don't you get a haircut?" Thinking back over a year about this boy made me ask if there was any place around the base where I could get the top trimmed lightly.

"Right here," the guy told me. And in a few seconds they slung a sheet around me and began clipping.

I said, "Don't take off too much," and went on kidding with the nurses. Pretty soon they began to snicker a little bit. I wasn't saying anything funny, so I turned to the barber and said, "Just a minute, friend, what's going on here?"

"Nothing," he said. "Why?"

That's what *I* wanted to know, "Why?" So I began to feel my head. The guy had given me a nice three-quarter bowl. I jumped up from the chair.

He grabbed me, saying, "Sit down and let me finish!"

"Let you finish?" I hollered. "Let you finish! What are you going to work on, skin?" I looked as if he'd cut it from the inside.

In the afternoon we played a couple of other hospitals. In one of them a medical sergeant said to me, "There's one kid here I wish you'd say hello to. He was carrying a tank of oxygen downstairs, slipped, dropped the tank, and it exploded, tearing off his legs." It's accidents like that—and there are hundreds of them—that must seem to the men who suffer them to be so useless; and yet theirs are just as much war wounds as those suffered in combat.

I guess there's no way of ever paying proper tribute to the way the nurses in all the hospitals treat our men. They're not only the greatest ministering angels in the world, they're the world's greatest morale builder-uppers. Just to see them in their crisp whites must make a man's heart feel confident. They're mothers, sisters, sweethearts, secretaries, and confidantes all rolled into one. And this war won't be properly recorded till a tribute is written to our nurses—a tribute glowing enough to measure up to their accomplishments. If that is ever written, it will be a mighty piece of literature.

That afternoon we heard again on the German radio that they were going to blast Bizerte right out of Africa. And Captain Cullen arrived with the news that he'd found a spot in Mateur where Block and I could go to work. It was Colonel Raymond Smith's modern apartment. And a nice

spot. Frances was also invited on condition that she didn't have to work. So after we finished our shows for the day we drove over to Mateur, skirting the harbor all the way. I kept wanting to turn off, but we couldn't. The harbor was there all the time, and so were all those targets in it. Along the harbor road, they kept telling me, was the shortest way. I'd rather have gone by way of Syracuse.

Colonel Smith gave Frances his room. A major who was sharing the apartment gave me his bed, and he slept on a couch. I didn't want to let them do it. But what chance has a civilian against a major and a colonel?

We would have gotten a lot of work done but for two things. Colonel Smith was a sensational host. And a modern apartment in the middle of broken-down Mateur was too comfortable. There was also a third thing. Every time Block and I started to work, we thought we heard something and kept running up to the roof to see what was going on in Bizerte. Nothing much was. There was some slight reconnaissance on the part of the Germans, but no real trouble.

We hit the sack fairly late. The Colonel told us reveille was off as far as we were concerned. But about five-thirty right outside our window an Arab auction got under way. These are held only once every three or four months, and it was just our luck to be on time. An Arab auction sounds like an ack-ack barrage, only more violent. You could no more sleep through one than you could sleep through a light strafing by about thirty Stukas. So we got up and went to the auction. They were selling everything: rugs, goats, girls. . . . I bought a girl, pulled the veil back, looked at her face . . . and started to bid on a Camel but the bidding went too high so I settled for an Old Gold. (Steady, Hope, you're writing a book!)

Colonel Smith gave us a breakfast that featured bacon . . . real bacon and eggs . . . real eggs. I asked him where he got the eggs. He said, "What do you think I have these eagles on my shoulders for?"

That opened up a whole routine. The lieutenant and captains have all the liquor because they have all the bars. The majors have most time off because they have the leaves. The



"What do you think I have these eagles on my shoulders for?"

colonels have the eagles to supply their eggs. And the generals have the stars. Looking it over, it's easy to see why there are more lieutenants and captains than anything.

We managed to squeeze in three or four or five shows a day around Bizerte for four or five more days—you get tired and time ceases to register—and finally wound up at the Bizerte Naval Base. That's where we got the first scuttlebutt about the coming invasion of continental Italy. "Scuttlebutt," that's Navy slang for gossip. Nobody seems to know how the word "scuttlebutt" got started unless somebody saw Crosby from the rear . . . although Crosby from the rear is definitely not rumor: that is solid fact. (NOTE TO COM-

POSITOR: Please leave the "c" in that last word even though you've seen Crosby from the rear.)

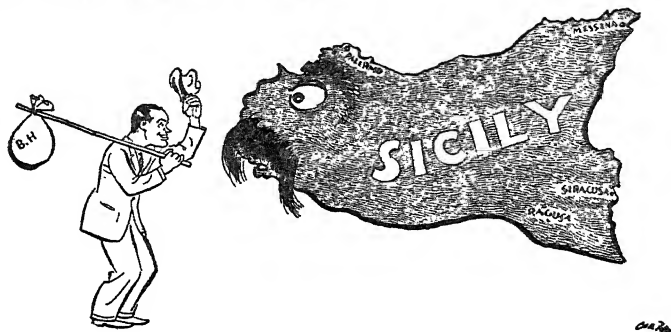
It was while we were at the Naval Base in Bizerte that a guy hollered to Pepper, "Hey, Jack, what are you doing here?" It was Pepper's brother, who's a Seabee; that's a sailor with room in his pants for a hammer. Neither knew where the other was. They're a fantastic bunch of guys, those Seabees. They're the sailors who read blueprints part of the time instead of *Esquire* all of the time. They're really rugged, and although they're only two years old they have a great reputation as a corps. When you hear the Marines have landed some place, the chances are the Seabees built what they landed on.

We were sitting around the hospital that evening getting ready to turn in, and Romano, who is no Swede, was dreaming of some nice meat balls tangled in a dish of spaghetti. It was Romano, you'll remember, who talked us into grinding porterhouse steaks into meat balls in London. We'd seen the world blown apart, and Tony was still with spaghetti and meat balls.

The phone rang. It was Captain Cullen to tell us that after our three-week break-in date in North Africa we were ready for the big time. They had a B-17 ready to take us to Sicily.

That was the most exciting phone call I've ever had. It meant first that Generals Patton, Allen, and Montgomery had the island sewed up and safe for comics. It also meant we were really going to get close to the front. Further than that, it meant that Tony could stop talking about spaghetti and meat balls long enough to scuttle a few,

CHAPTER 10



Two Days on a Sunny Island

I'LL never forget our flight across the Mediterranean to Sicily. It was a beautiful, clear day, and for a little while they let me fly the Fortress. And I handled it like a veteran, the crew told me as they climbed into their parachutes and prepared to bail out. But those pilots sure are brave. And ours was a little short guy who'd been on about fifty missions. He was only about five feet tall, but he was a giant in a B-17.

And those navigators! Imagine hitting a little island in the middle of a great big body of water. I can't even find the soap in the bathtub. As I write this, it's even hard to find the soap in a grocery store. But a navigator can find anything. He just takes out some maps, shoots the sun, draws a circle on his map, trisects the circle, figures the number of degrees in each angle against his compass reading, cuts the cards, and before you know it he's located the only blonde in town.

I was really worried on that trip to Sicily. It was the way the waist gunner kept scanning the sky. The gunner kept looking slowly around and then looking slowly back again. "If there's any trouble," I said, "I've handled a 50-mm. machine gun. I'll man a gun."

The Sergeant said, "Thanks! But who we gonna get to man you?"

The more I think about it, the surer I am that the flight to Sicily was the most exciting plane trip I've ever made. Even being lost over Alaska didn't seem to excite me the way the trip to Sicily did. Come to think of it, I wasn't excited at all when we were lost over Alaska. I was scared.

On the way to Sicily, I made a speech to Tony, Jack, and Frances. I was supposed to be the head of the unit. We had an arrangement. I was the head and Frances was the legs.

It wasn't much of a speech. But it got a typical reaction from those three understanding people. I said, "As you know, we're going to Sicily. Maybe you don't realize it, but this will be closer to the active front than any entertainers have ever been so far. We're going to be right behind the troops. I'm telling you this because I want you to realize what Sicily means."

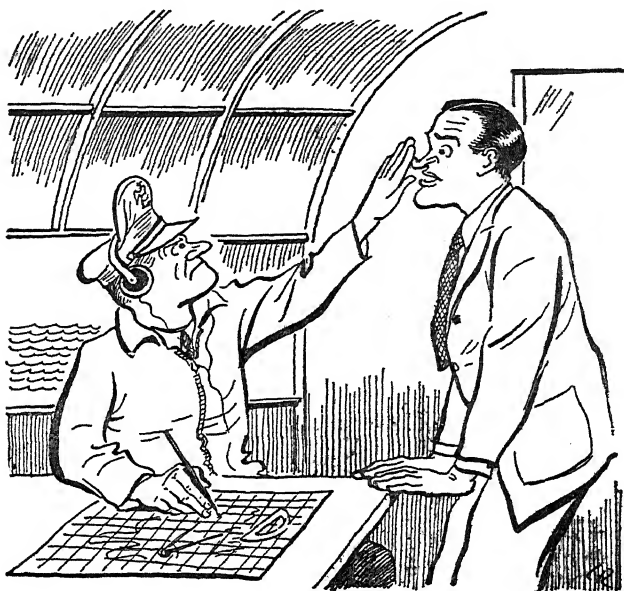
I could tell what they were thinking. But Tony expressed it perfectly. He said, "Spaghetti and meat balls."

Jack was more serious. He had what was for him a very solemn, thoughtful expression. He didn't say a word. He was asleep. Frances was calm, and Hal Block kept looking down at the Mediterranean the way New York kids peer down subway gratings for pennies. "What are you looking for?" I asked. "A quiet place where we can write our broadcast?" You could tell how calm I was by my voice, which sounded like Henry Aldrich looking at his first fan dancer.

As usual, when we left Africa we didn't know what town or airport we were heading for. They never told us that sort of thing until we were well under way. And until they felt like it. The Army lets fly with less information than I used to give out in an arithmetic class.

I kept pumping Mike Cullen, but he wouldn't prime; just kept muttering, "I'm in the Army." Naturally, I wouldn't ask him a direct question. The Army hates people with a

thirst for knowledge. They welcome questions about as much as a gay on his honeymoon welcomes the hives.



The Army hates people with a thirst for knowledge.

There was nothing for me to do but wander around the old Fortress. And I'm not kidding. You *can* wander around them. I happened to be riding up in the greenhouse—that's way up in the front where the bomb-sight and the nose guns are—when we picked up the Sicilian coast. It was a beautiful sight. It gave me a great thrill to see it lying down there. It looked so peaceful . . . Sicily, Mother of Bootleggers.

The navigator finally broke down and told me we were landing about forty miles north of Palermo.

I rushed back to talk to Cullen. "Will we get into Palermo?" I asked.

He said, "Sure. That's where we're going. You do your first show at a hospital in Palermo."

"Why didn't you tell me?" I said.

"I told you why," he answered. "I'm in the Army."

"Do you think we'll get to see General Patton?" I asked.

At this Mike loosened up and really gave out some information. He said, "Maybe."

Three days after Messina fell, we'd landed and were driving into Palermo to do a show for the men who'd been hurt helping to restore Sicily to the Italians.

But, as we drove into Palermo, it didn't look much like Sicily to us. The countryside could have been around San Bernardino or Santa Barbara, California, depending on whether you were looking toward the hills or the ocean. And the road was jammed solid both ways with the American Army going to and from Messina. As they rolled by, we'd lean out and wave and holler to them. The soldiers would holler back and then, a couple of seconds later, they'd do the biggest kind of Hollywood take. The whole American Army in Sicily had suddenly turned into a few hundred thousand Edward Everett Hortons. After they recognized us we could hear our names echoing down the line of vehicles.

Pretty soon it seemed to me that our names were being hollered all over. All I could hear was, "It's Frances Langford! Frances Langford! Frances Langford!" I kept sticking my head out further and further until one guy passed in a truck and screamed, "It's Bob Hope. Let me out, it's Bob Hope! I've got to get to talk to Bob Hope!"

He was my tailor way back in B. H. (That's not Beverly Hills, that's Before Hershey.)

No kidding, though, it was terribly exciting. It was like a successful surprise party, and I don't know which parties were the most surprised, the soldiers at seeing us or ourselves at realizing where we were. Mike Cullen told us that within twenty-four hours every person on the island of Sicily knew we were there. We began to see a few native Sicilians. Some were still going home to Palermo from where they'd been

hiding in the hills. They waved to us, too, and were even glad to see us when they heard who we were and what we did. You know, that German vaudeville is terrible. All opening acts.

It was around noon of a Saturday when we rolled into Palermo and left our toothbrushes at the Excelsior Hotel. Excelsior! Nice comfortable name for a hotel, isn't it? You'd think that during an air raid you'd be safe from breakage sleeping in the Excelsior. Believe me, a guy isn't. I know, I shared an air raid with a few other people in the Excelsior . . . but not sleeping.

We had a little lunch, and during it Tony made contact with the chef and opened negotiations for spaghetti and meat balls. Considerable Italian conversation flowed over Tony's bridge and resulted in an iron-bound promise that spaghetti and meat balls would be ready for us when we returned to the hotel that evening. We figured to be back right after a show we were scheduled to do at the Seventh Army Ball Park in Palermo.

After lunch we played a large hospital. It was probably a converted school. To show you how you run into people, though, as we were walking into the hospital I met Colonel Hopping, who had been technical director for David Butler on our picture, *Caught in the Draft*. We made a date to meet later at the hotel. At the hospital in Palermo I again had that great realization of how marvelous all our guys are. Each time I worked a hospital I had that indescribable feeling about them . . . and what they gave me. And each time I figured it would be the last time. It seemed to me that the emotional upsurge had to wear off. It didn't. It was just as great in Sicily as it was at the first hospital we played in the States. In case you feel that part of the emotional excitement was the increasing nearness to the battle area, I thought that could be it, too. Then I came home and played Mare Island Naval Hospital at San Francisco and got it all over again.

No, there's just something those guys give you when you face them; their spirit reaches out and grabs you. In Palermo, as we were going through the wards one kid said to me, "Gee, Bob, do you think you ought to be here? You're taking an awful chance."

I wonder why they kept saying things like that to me. None of them ever told Frances she shouldn't be there. Nobody ever complained that she was getting too close. I must ask a psychologist why the men seemed so much more anxious to talk to her than to me. The reason I want to ask a psychologist is because the only person I've mentioned this to told me I'd better talk to a psychologist.



CR

I must ask a psychologist why the men seemed so much more anxious to talk to her than to me.

While we were going through the wards I said to Lieutenant Colonel McCormick, the Special Service officer who'd met us in Palermo, "Where do we go from here?"

He said, "General Patton wants to meet you. So he thought maybe after you're finished here you could come over and shake hands with him." You can't get a nicer invitation than that, so we did.

Old "Blood and Guts" was living in the King's Palace. It's a nice little shack, too. Those Savoy's live pretty well. No wonder they keep figuring how to stick in the King business.

As we walked into the suite Patton was using for an office, we saw through an open door into a large room where the General was decorating two American Indians from the Forty-fifth Division of the Seventh Army. The ceremony was simple. Just like the movies. They saluted each other and shook hands after the General pinned on the medal. Then he called to us to come in.

First thing he wanted to know was how everything was in California. He told us that a great many of the men we'd played for at the California and Arizona Desert Training Centers were now in Sicily with him. That was tough news, because I had to try to remember which jokes I'd used at the Desert Training Centers so as not to hit them twice with the same egg.

General Patton wanted to know all about our trip, particularly little details, and who we'd met, and all about the men in the various spots we'd been. He didn't have an awful lot of time to carry on small talk, though. Reports kept coming in. After a few minutes we wound up having our pictures taken with him and taking his picture. When that was over, he wanted to take our pictures. I was kind of sorry about all the stuff I read in the papers about him. As far as I'm concerned, a general can have war fatigue, too.

When Patton took our picture, that was the finish. Every place we went you'd think every soldier in the Army of the

United States carried some kind of camera as standard equipment. After meeting Patton I found even the generals had them. Our men are going to have quite a bunch of photographs of places to show their kids when they get home. The men in the European Theater will be able to use the snapshots to teach their kids geography. The guys in the South Pacific will use their snapshots for biology.

Speaking of pictures, the Army wouldn't let me mail the post cards I wrote in Palermo. Security, they said! They claimed that sending post card pictures of the Bay of Palermo indicated where we were. I offered to fix the cards to fool everybody. But the Army still didn't think I ought to send them even if I wrote, "Funny they should be selling pictures of Palermo in London." So I delivered the cards in person.

Block and I thought we ought to use all our spare time working on the broadcast we were scheduled to do from Algiers in what had now become less than a week. But it did strike us funny that the first really quiet spot we'd found was Sicily. We'd just about collected paper and pencils and put ourselves in the mood to write a few gags when in walks Mike Cullen to tell us we're on at the Palermo Ball Park. It had been a soccer field where the Sicilians went to get their kicks.

There were about sixteen thousand guys jammed into that park. When I came on and did my monologue they were just so excited not a sound came out of them. Then I introduced Tony and Jack, and they cheered like mad. When I brought Langford on those sixteen thousand guys whistled as one man and blew me right off the platform.

While Frances was singing, General Patton's aide came to invite us to have supper with the General. Naturally, we accepted.

As we came out of the ball park after the show we had to pass through long rows of soldiers. But the Provost Marshal had seen the show and had us well protected with MPs. There

was a string of them on each side of us. And they made us feel a whole lot safer. All of a sudden somebody yelled, "How are you, Bob?"

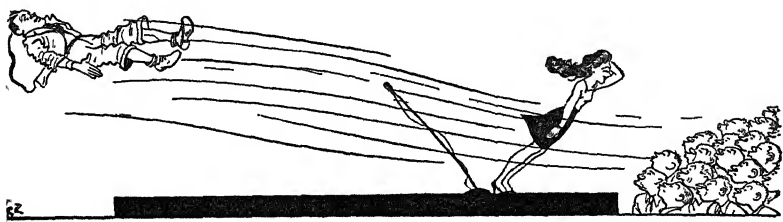
I couldn't see anybody, but I hollered back, "How are you, Mac?"

"Great, Bob. It's Ernie," the guy answered, "Ernie Pyle." And then I saw little Ernie wriggling through the crowd. We told him where we were going, and he asked where we were stopping. When I told him, he said he'd be there waiting for us to come back.

General Patton put out the first cream of tomato soup we'd had in months. This began a terrific dinner that featured pot roast. And he seasoned the meal with a crackling brand of humor that must make most guests feel great, but definitely makes a comedian wonder if he chose the right line of work. I didn't open my big fat mouth without getting topped.

After dinner he showed us around the Palace. His bedroom had been the Queen's. The General had thrown an Army mosquito net over the bed. Pointing to the decoration of the room, he told us, "All my life I've heard about things being done 'to the queen's taste.' If this is it, I'll take Macy's basement."

He also showed us his brace of pearl-handled six guns, and I think it was while looking at these I remembered he hadn't been to the show at the ball park. I asked him why,



***Sixteen thousand guys whistled as one man and blew me
right off the platform.***

thinking he'd tell me he'd heard my jokes. What he said was, "It might have made the men self-conscious."

I figured a guy under the strain Patton was under must be pretty tired, so we started to go through the motions of leaving, but he wouldn't let us go. Just kept us talking till we wound up doing the whole show for the General and his staff. So, you see, even though you live in only a small palace and may have no more than twenty-five or thirty people for us to play to, as the General did, don't think we're not available. Write for rates.

When we got back to the Excelsior, Ernie Pyle was waiting for us in the bar, as he said he'd be. He'd been through the whole African campaign. And what a job he'd done of reporting the soldier's point of view! I mean, practically the first thing he said to me was, "Boy, I'm glad you got over here to see what those guys have gone through!" I'm glad, too.

The best thing they had to drink at the Excelsior was cold wine. It was wonderful. I asked the waiter what kind of wine the Sicilians drank most. He said they drank both red and white, but now that the Americans had come everybody was calling for red, white, and blue.

While we were talking Pepper asked a kid over to our table to have a drink and was saying to him, "You're a Ranger, aren't you?"

The kid just nodded, "Yeah!"

I happened to have seen some of that Ranger training, and I know it's tough. To learn all about how really grim it is, read Captain Ralph Ingersoll's book, *The Battle Is the Payoff*. People have a habit of calling our Rangers "Commandos." They're not. Commandos strike quickly, generally by water, and leave after accomplishing their mission. When the Rangers strike, their mission is generally to stay until relieved. They're just tougher infantry. And the United States infantry is plenty tough.

But this little guy didn't look tough enough to play the

younger brother of a dead-end kid. We began to ask him about where he'd been, and little by little he unbuttoned his lip. Before long he was actually reciting a poem he'd written. Pretty soon another Ranger came into the spot, and we motioned for him to join us.

The newcomer took a look at the Ranger with us and said, "Haven't I seen you before?"

Our kid said, "I don't know. What part of hell you from?"

That was the end of our first day in Sicily. And one of the fullest days of my life.

Sunday morning I got up bright and early, because I was anxious to get my teeth into the Palermo funnies. Next thing I knew we were playing for nineteen thousand men in a gully forty miles outside of town. They were the Forty-fifth Division. They were terraced up the hillside under that bright Sicilian sun. Apparently the entire division had hijacked a vineyard. And there were those nineteen thousand rugged, sun-tanned citizens, each with a helmet full of grapes and his rifle on his knee. I wasn't afraid they'd throw the grapes. But how they looked at Frances! That was the only place we played where the MPs wore rubber gloves and went around pushing the men's eyes back in.

It was also the only show we did under an aerial umbrella. The whole time we were working they kept half a dozen P-38s circling around over us. It not only gives you a feeling of security, it gives you a feeling your jokes aren't being heard. You have to use different timing when a fighter plane dives on every point. I kept wondering if we were being short-waved to the pilots.

After we finished the show we went out to have lunch with a bunch of antiaircraft guys who couldn't get in to see us. As we drove along the road, guys who had seen us—the guys with the grapes—began chucking bunches of grapes into our car. It was a nice gesture. But at 30 m.p.h. grapes stain. What a snoot full of wine I had.

Those anti-aircraft boys were quite a bunch of rough-necks. They lived right next to their guns in caves out in the hills. It had been so long since they'd seen a girl that a bunch of them were standing in line to buy tickets to see a hula dancer tattooed on a guy's chest.

It was while we were with these guys that I got the idea to collect a few trophies. All the men at the camp were wearing big Italian machine gun shells for watch charms. But I'd heard so much about booby traps I was afraid to pick up anything. I didn't even dare take off my hat.

Our next stop was clear back through Palermo and twenty-five miles in the other direction, where we played for General Gaffe's Second Armored Division. They were all motorized, and those guys could make anything run. They certainly did a job on the Germans. The men in that armored outfit never think of asking for replacements. If they're short of transportation they just open a can of Spam, eat the contents, and make the can into a jeep. And brave! You've probably heard about the men who walked across Niagara Falls on a rope. Every one of those tank men fought halfway across Sicily on a tread.

Missed our spaghetti and meat balls again Sunday night. We had dinner with a bunch of fliers at an aviator's rest home in the suburbs of Palermo. They gave us canned spaghetti. This rest home, all set up and operating only three days after the fall of Sicily, was a spot where airmen could relax and replenish their nerves after some particularly tough missions.

After dinner they told me they were showing a great picture. Naturally, I stayed to see it because it had two of my favorite stars. The picture was *My Favorite Blonde*. Just think, Madeleine Carroll and Bing Crosby.

But I really was anxious to see the picture because I'd never seen it . . . that is, in front of an audience of Army fliers in Palermo. But the kids got kind of a kick out of having me sit there heckling myself in every scene. I told them how



Naturally, I stayed to see it because it had two of my favorite stars.

each shot was made and what was going on behind the camera. Nothing was going on in front of it.

Finally it got kind of late, so they gave us a jeep and a flashlight to drive home with. Driving through Palermo in a jeep during a total blackout is a new type of suicide. We couldn't see a thing. Fortunately, jeeps will go anywhere. And so did we. We went over roofs, in and out of windows, down chimneys, and through people's bedrooms.

We stopped at one point to try to get our bearings and heard a woman say in Italian, "Darling, you've been drinking again." I flashed on my electric torch and found we were parked right in the middle of one of those great big Italian beds with the exhaust of the jeep pointing right in the woman's face. We apologized and drove out the window.

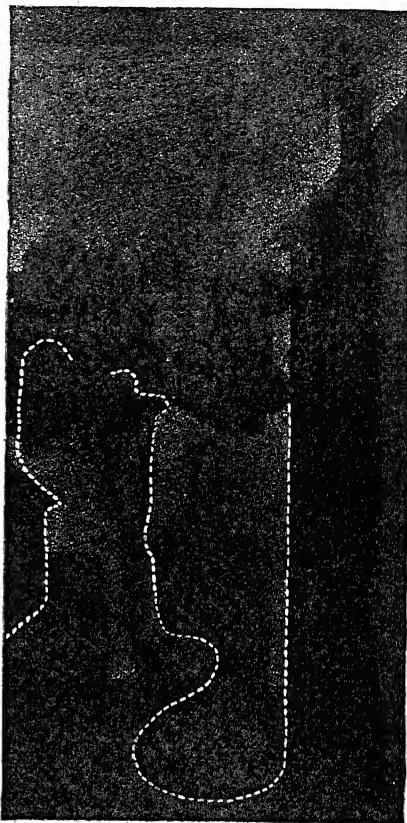
Ernie Pyle, who'd been with us all day, said if we could only get a patent on that jeep ride we'd put the chute-the-chutes, roller coaster, old mill, and tunnel of love all out of business . . . with one grand omnibus of torture.

I hit the pad about eleven-thirty and the next thing I knew I was sitting up, looking around, and listening to shots from an Army forty-five and footsteps running up and down the corridor. The first thing I thought of was that a husband had come home at the wrong time. Then I thought of sabotage and fifth column stuff. The next thing I thought of was jumping out the window. Fortunately, the fourth thing I thought of was that we were on the fourth floor.

While all these important things were racing through my noggin, the shots and footsteps moved up to the roof. I listened to them a minute, thinking of all the gangster pictures I'd seen where crooks were trapped on roofs.

Then, all of a sudden I heard them down in the street vanishing in the distance. "It's a hell of a chase," I said to myself. "Wonder what Gene Autry's doing in town?"

For a few seconds it was quiet, and I began to think more calmly. It occurred to me that my door might not be locked. I considered getting up to find out. Then I wondered what difference it made. I could see myself piling chairs and dress-



Driving through Palermo in a jeep during a total blackout is a new type of suicide.

ers against the door to protect myself from a fate worse than death. I was beginning to think a little screwy.

All of a sudden there was a distant vroom! and I saw a tracer bullet go scooting across the sky. Then I thought I knew what all the shooting was for. When I heard the drone of JU-88s, I knew we were in for it.

The docks, which were naturally the target for the raid, were only about two blocks away. And two blocks isn't very far as the bomb flies. If I ever get into the diplomatic service I'll suggest an agreement among all nations to put their best hotels farther away from the docks and railway stations . . . maybe even in another town.

They say when you're drowning, your whole life flashes before your eyes. I don't know about you, but with me it's the same way with bombing. I thought of my first professional tour in vaudeville. I went twenty miles from Cleveland to East Palestine, Ohio. I remember wondering at that time what it would be like really to go on the road . . . maybe even to Chicago. As I thought of East Palestine, and the distance I'd traveled to get to the Excelsior Hotel in Palermo, I listened to the 500-pounders blowing the docks to bits, and I wished sincerely that I was back in East Palestine.

I thought of doing everything in the world but going to the bomb shelter in the basement. I began to talk to myself:

"Should I put my helmet on?"

"That's silly, to wear your helmet in bed!"

"Maybe I should get under the bed."

"What for? If the stuff can come through the roof it can come through the bed. Besides, it's better for you to ride down on the bed than for the bed to land on you."

"I could put my head under the pillow."

"With your allergies?"

"How about the closet?"

"You won't meet a soul."

"Should I reach for a cigarette?"

"Too far to the sidewalk."

"Maybe I should go to the bathroom."

"Too late."

This delightful dialogue was interrupted when a great big hunk of red-hot flak sailed past my window and the Heinies started dive-bombing. One Nazi, obviously aiming for my room, also let go with all his machine guns on his way down. Between the strafing and the screeching of the Stukas as they dived, you've got a noise that I'd trade any day for a record of you know who. And the Germans weren't making it all themselves. We were throwing plenty of stuff at them, too. I joined in. I threw up my dinner.

After you've listened to a raid for a little while you begin to be afraid that just the noise will kill you; then after you've listened to it a little while longer you begin to be afraid it won't. You want to curl up in a ball. And you want the ball to be batted out of the park. You want a home run! You want!

There must have been a hundred Junkers in that raid with fighter escort. That was the most frightening experience of my life, and I've sat through many a Crosby picture.

When it was all over Hal Block came back from the shelter, and all I could think to say was, "Do you suppose Doo-little knows we've taken Sicily?"

Block said, "I thought we were supposed to have air superiority."

I said, "We must have, or those guys would have taken us back with them to work in German pictures." I'm still a little young for those Emil Jannings parts.

Captain Mike Cullen, who had more important work to do than worry about us when the raid started, came in and told us Frances was all right. She had stayed in her room, too—but she needed a bulldozer to break a path through the fallen plaster from her bed to the door.

Tony came in with his guitar. He'd been with the chef.

And the last to show up was Jack Pepper. He'd been down in the shelter. All he had on was a helmet and shorts. Seems he'd been doing his laundry when the raid came, and so as not to lose it, he'd slipped it on.

When I was sure that our whole troupe was okay, I got out of bed. I was surprised to find I could stand up. First thing I did was reach for the telephone. It didn't work. So I went downstairs and asked the clerk to make out my bill. "How are you enjoying your stay in Palermo?" he asked.

"Nice little town," I said, "wasn't it?"

Later at breakfast I was telling Mike my reactions. He said, "Don't tell me that you showed the white feather?"

I said, "What's that?"

Mike said, "Why, when you're scared, you show the white feather."

"Mike," I said, "shake hands with an ostrich."



"Mike, shake hands with an ostrich."

Immediately after the raid that Monday morning we did a very smart thing. We went all the way across Sicily to a little spot called Palma di Mont-something-or-other. It's about twenty-five or thirty miles east of Licata and almost the farthest point in Sicily from Messina.

At Palma they put us up in a place that had formerly been a Fascist Youth Movement Hostel. That's a nice place to live. Anything could be a booby trap. I was afraid to open my own trap to brush my teeth. But it was quiet. And Block said it looked like a good spot to get the broadcast whipped into shape.

We also did two shows between Palma and Licata. One for the men of the Ninth Division and the other for Terry Allen's First Infantry. Those were the guys who fought their way across Africa to Tunis. Pretty tough guys.

I met General Allen, and he's proud of his men and the record they made. And his men loved him. They told me that a guy might jump into a fox-hole with you and it would be General Allen. Didn't know generals got that close, eh?

I found that the nearer we got to the front the closer became the association of officers and men. Under fire, they're all men! General Allen's just generally proud, too, of how solid the United States Infantryman can be. He had me meet one guy who's stopped half a dozen tanks and his hands were all burned. "From the barrel of the gun?" I asked. The guy looked astonished, and then he looked questioningly at General Allen. "Does he think we use guns, sir?"

You should have seen the pack that guy was carrying. They have to take everything they own with them. He showed me what was in his roll. There was a blanket, a raincoat, a shelter half, extra shoes, emergency rations, first-aid stuff, camera, photographs, letters, and an MP he'd won in a crap game in Gafsa.

But, let's face it, the infantry is really getting old-fashioned. There's practically nothing left for them to do. After the

planes get through their job, and the tanks get through their job, and the artillery has done its job, about the only thing left for the infantry is to step in and do all the fighting.

It got so hot in Sicily we thought we'd be more comfortable if we did our shows in shorts. Frances was the first to try it. Her singing was the most enjoyable those guys ever laid eyes on. What an inspiration a pair of Hollywood legs were to those men! A few days later, Italy surrendered.

In Licata we ran into some more friends from home. A couple of guys taking pictures turned out to be Bob Wallace and Phil Stern, who used to cover the *Ciro's* beat in Hollywood. I asked them how they liked it. They said it was nothing new, night club photographers were used to taking pictures of fighting.

Block and I had Monday evening all to ourselves, so we started to get to work on the broadcast. We'd been working about ten minutes when kids began wandering in. And I don't mean Fascist Youths, either. The first one was a boy who stood in the doorway and said, "Hello, Bob, how's everything at the Palladium? I'm from Glendale."

The Palladium's a very fancy dance hall on Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood, right across from Earl Carroll's, where all the big-name bands play and all the hep-cats cut their rugs. I guess he asked me how things were at the Palladium because I'd run out of Holeproofs and was wearing a pair of Frances' bobby-socks.

We talked back and forth for a while about souvenirs and stuff. Finally this guy from Glendale went away and came back with three guns and three more guys. One guy gave us a Mauser, and a sergeant named Cunningham slipped me a little Berretti. I asked him about the chances of getting a Fascist dirk to take home. He told me they were pretty tough to get. You almost needed brown points. He was kind of hard-boiled about everything. But suddenly he softened up and said, "Say, when you get back will you drop a line to my

wife? I haven't seen my kids in over two years." Then he ducked out of the room. He came back in fifteen minutes with a hot dirk.

I was doing so good I asked another fellow if he knew where I could get hold of a Lueger. He said, "Gaglioni has one." I asked, "Where do I find Gaglioni?"

The guy said, "Gaglioni's with a bunch of guys about five miles from here guarding a railroad station."

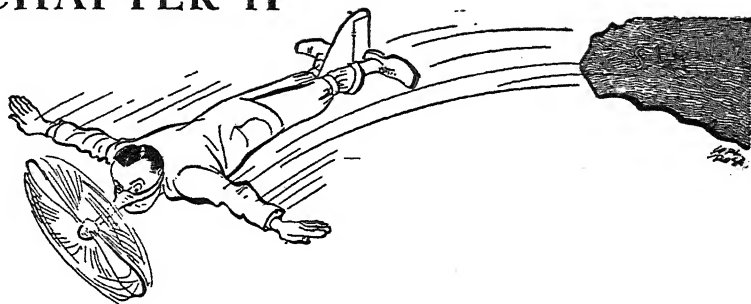
I asked the kid to see Gaglioni for me. In about twenty minutes he phoned and said, "Gaglioni's got your Lueger for you. Come and get it."

We hopped in a jeep and went down to the station and did a show for Gaglioni and the Lueger. Didn't get back to our rooms at the Youth House till about ten thirty or eleven. But we did work until well after two. That was the first actual work we'd done on the broadcast. It was now early Tuesday morning, and we were on the air Thursday in Algiers.

The only reason we stopped at two was because they'd told us the electricity might fail and gave us an acetylene gas lantern. Sure enough, the electricity went out and we lit the lantern. The guy who gave it to us said, "If this starts to flicker and get dim, pump it."

It kept flickering and getting dim and I kept pumping it. I got so exasperated I read the instructions printed on it. They said, "Don't pump this unless you're an experienced user. Improper pumping may result in an explosion." We almost went on the air two days too soon.

CHAPTER 11



Africa Speaks, Hope Listens

EARLY Tuesday morning the Army flew us out of Licata in a C-47, headed for Bône, Africa. Block and I figured the flight would be a good chance to get some work done on the broadcast. At least in the air they *had* to leave us alone. Then we got a gander at our fighter escort, three P-40s, and we *hoped* they would leave us alone. Those fighters had us scared stiff. They'd come in so close that they almost touched wing-tips with us. I don't believe in that high tipping.

One of the things we'd escaped so far was being shot at while flying. It's an experience anyone can easily do without. But those fighters buzzing around were fascinating. Naturally, we'd been given ditching instructions and parachutes. But one of those chutes is a piece of equipment I'd rather not get too familiar with. I've always hated the thought of starting any trip with a jerk.

So, instead of trying to write jokes, I just sat there and thought a little bit about the trip. Now that we were on the last lap it seemed even more important than ever not to slip off. Somehow or other the ship that cracks up just coming in

for a landing seems a little more to be regretted than the one that spun in far from home.

But it seemed presumptuous of me to worry. As Captain Jack Dailey, Paramount publicity man from Texas, pointed out in a letter I received from North Africa during the Christmas holidays, a civilian in a dugout, frightened that a bomb may score a direct hit, has nothing but that to bother him. He has no job, no responsibility, and no other men to think of. But a soldier is out there, subject to all the noise, exposed to all the bombs and all the falling flak and strafing, and he still has to do his task.

It's fantastic and miraculous how those jobs get done and how our men have the mental stability, the stamina, and the moral fiber to carry on, many times in the face of inevitable death. I've watched a navigator work as we flew from place to place. He sits calmly and triangulates. That's easy for him. I don't understand it, but he does. But think of the tremendous will power and mental discipline it takes for a man to concentrate on higher mathematics in a fast-moving airplane that's being shot at by ack-ack guns and fighter planes.

I have to shut the door and ask the children to be quiet before I can add up my day's golf scores. Of course, that's pretty high adding, but even so. . . .

That's what ran through my mind on the plane coming back from Sicily. That, and a rough, unformed version of what Gary Cooper expressed almost perfectly the first time I ran into him after he'd returned from the South Pacific area. Gary said, "We're kind of lucky, Bob. Us folks in show business get to see what our men are really doing. Being able to see that is a privilege . . . a wonderful privilege! We ought to be damn proud!"

Funny thing, when Gary said that, it made me realize how these trips have changed us. Everyone claims I'm a little more serious than I was. I suppose they mean a little more hammy. But being in the South Pacific changed Gary, too.

Imagine Gary Cooper, who—believe me—is really as shy as he appears in pictures—imagine Coop getting up before a bunch of G.I.s and singing “Pistol-Packin’ Mamma.” Of course they also hollered for the big Lou Gehrig speech from the picture *The Pride of the Yankees*.

Those men . . . those soldiers . . . that I met and Coop met and every one of us who’s been privileged to see them in action and to talk to them in their spare time has met—they’re not just the bunch of crap-shooting, wolfing guys we like to joke about. Those men are men, with the deepest emotions and the keenest feelings men can have about everything that life holds dear.

A soldier’s the most sentimental guy in the world, the most religious, and the kindest. I guess the nearer you get to death, the better you become. It’s getting good the hard way . . . but that’s the only way you’ll ever really make it.

Before I climbed out of my reverie and got back to thinking on my own level about the broadcast, war came rolling down a landing strip outside Bône after one of the most uneventful air trips I’ve ever made.

This was our first visit to Bône. It was one of the points of embarkation for the Sicilian and Italian invasions, and the *Luftwaffe* had really cut Bône deep. But, at that, it looked better to us than Sicily. The dust of bombardment had had more time to settle. I guess we were getting a little tired and touchy. I know for about the last three weeks I was a chain-smoker. But then I got tired of chains and went back to smoking tobacco.

At Bône we made an appearance at a race track. I was lucky that day—nobody claimed me. And we did a show for a mixed audience of American and British forces. Naturally, I had a translator. There were not only soldiers and sailors, there were plenty of WACs and WRENs and Red Cross personnel of all kinds, as well as both English and American nurses. It was one of the most cosmopolitan groups we played

for the whole time we were gone, and it was in front of this bunch that some guy way in the back hollered at me: "Draft dodger! Why aren't you in uniform?"

I just hollered back, "Don't you know there's a war going on? A guy could get hurt!"

The fact that he hollered at me shows you how far back he was sitting. He must have been halfway to Sicily. Anyone closer could have seen that General Hershey was going out of his way to snub me. Of course that's how I looked then. Now that I'm back, I look even worse.

People who are in a position to see a lot of confidential stuff tell me that next to my name on the draft list is a little note saying, "Complete surrender is preferable to this man's induction."

After the show we had lunch at the Red Cross, and Block got one of the girls there to act as our secretary. It was now Tuesday afternoon, we had to go to Kairouan to do a couple of shows, and the broadcast was still scheduled for Thursday night in Algiers. It was scheduled, but not written. Block figured that, at least, the secretary could share the responsibility for the fiasco. And she was willing and anxious to make the trip. So we took her.

The flight from Bône to Kairouan was one of the funniest air trips I've ever made. It had an *ad lib* quality you don't generally find in military aviation. The guy who was flying us, Lieutenant La Prade, started looking for a landing strip like, say, number 154. Out there on the Tunisian wasteland every landing strip looks alike. The only thing that's different is the camouflage. So he'd locate a strip in the vicinity of where we should be landing and come in gently, leave his engine running, ask the number of the field, and then zoom off again . . . the way you pull into a filling station to find out where you turn off to get to Rancho Santa Fe.

It was a lucky thing we were in a C-47. They handle like bicycles. Fliers love them. They'll take off up-wind, down-

wind, or cross-wind; they'll fly forward, backward, or sideways. I'll bet even I could land one.

After about four tries we found the spot where the Eighty-second Airborne Division was expecting us. It was kind of late in the afternoon, but we went right on and did a show. Just as we finished they set off a twenty-five-pound charge of dynamite right behind the platform we were working on. It nearly blew me out of my shoes and scared me out of what was left of my youth.

The Airborne guys just laughed and laughed. To them twenty-five pounds of dynamite isn't any more important than those peewee firecrackers we used to let explode in our hand to impress the girl across the street.

Those Airborne guys are really hard-hitting hombres. Sort of Commandos, they are. But they don't land in boats—they land in parachutes. That makes it tougher. You can always get into a boat and go away. A parachute's a one-way vehicle. And among these tough guys I met Lieutenant Jimmie Smith, a guy I always used to run into at the Stork Club. I mean the Stork Club in New York, not Crosby's house.

The second show we did for the Eighty-second Airborne was one of the few night shows we played. We practically worked by candlelight. There was one, just one, very low-powered spotlight shining up at me. I looked a little like Bela Lugosi with jokes. And some of the jokes sounded like Karloff frightened by Lorre.

Counting the two shows, we played for about five thousand of these paratroopers, most of whom had had something to do with the Sicilian campaign.

After the first show they presented Frances with a miniature parachute. After the second show they put on an exhibition of jumping. Two or three groups offered to let me jump with them. But I declined. Not that I'm scared. It's just that there are two forms of air travel I'd rather avoid. One is the parachute, the other the glider.

A glider pilot in Texas once asked me to fly with him. I told him I wasn't interested in his three-knot ship.

"What do you mean, three knot?" he said. "They're faster than three knots."

"They'll always be three-knot ships to me," I told him. "Not comfortable . . . not safe . . . and I'm not going."

When the jumping exhibition was over they showed us all to our quarters. First we came to Frances' tent. There was an armed guard on duty. The tent was furnished with a little radio, mosquito netting, a captured Italian cot, and all the comforts that could be found around the camp. It made us guys feel pretty good to see how these sky-soldiers were taking care of us. Then they took us to our tent.

It was exactly the same kind of tent except that instead of cots there were five stretchers about three inches off the ground.

I got one gander at the layout and said, "I wish Morgenthau could see how I'm going to spend the night."

Our discomfort with those ground-hugging cribs got worse when Block and I went looking for a quiet place to work on the broadcast. I mean, who wants to sleep on a stretcher in the first place. Then we found out about the wild life of the country.

Walking along the row of tents looking for one in which we could get a little privacy, we saw a corporal with a flashlight looking around as if he'd lost something. I asked him what was wrong. He said he was looking for his little playmate.

The playmate turned out to be a desert rat. We got a look at one, and believe me our stretchers were too close to the ground for the rat to get under.

We finally chased everybody out of our own tent and started to work. But it was just the way it was at Licata. Guys kept coming in trying to give us souvenirs. By this time I was loaded and didn't dare take any more. One kid wanted



Guys kept coming in trying to give us souvenirs.

to give me a big Berretti machine gun. Another guy came in with a huge box. I said, "What's that?"

He said, "It's an Italian rocket. Want to take it home?"

I didn't want a live rocket anywhere near me. I might find myself riding home *on* it. The kid said, "Well, if you don't want it, we'll set it off."

And they did. The thing went off with a mighty swoosh, and, of course, we all went out to see how it lit up the country. It was all very interesting but didn't bring us any closer to getting the second line of the broadcast, which we had to do in just exactly forty-eight hours.

Finally we reluctantly stretched out on our stretchers, and to my amazement I went to sleep. I guess by that time I could

have slept anywhere. To wake us up the next morning, the first call was another one of those twenty-five-pound charges of dynamite. It was set off right outside the flap of our tent. I'll say this for it: it woke me up. But those G.I.s didn't need anything like that. They never have any trouble getting up at six in the morning. They jump into their clothes, wash, brush their teeth, and shave . . . and then open their eyes.

On the way to the chowline I passed Frances' tent. The guard was still standing there. "I want to thank you," I said. "She was sure well taken care of."

"Yes, sir," he said.

"You'd have shot anyone who tried to molest her, wouldn't you?"

"Absolutely, sir, if I'd had any bullets in my gun."

We ate breakfast with the men at benches and tables out in the open, like at a great big public picnic ground. And after breakfast we saw several of the men presented with medals they'd won in the Sicilian action.

I also got a valued souvenir from Lieutenant Pat Patterson. It's a Nylon map of Italy and Sicily. Looks just like the maps you used to get here at service stations, only more detailed, if that's possible. And they're much easier to fold. They fold up into less space than a silk handkerchief. All paratroopers carry them. The one Lieutenant Patterson gave me is autographed and shows where he landed. If I ever made a parachute jump I could tell you in advance where I'd land.

Before noon we climbed into the plane with Lieutenant La Prade and headed for Algiers. All plane trips can't be eventful, and the one from Kairouan to Algiers wasn't. The only thing that made it exciting was the fact that there was something in Algiers we all looked forward to seeing. It was our laundry.

We'd left it there on our trip in. Tony's spaghetti and meat balls and my anxiety to get the broadcast written took

second place when we realized that we were actually going to see our wash again.

Naturally, the first thing we did when we hit the airport was to head for the Aletti Hotel for a change of linen. But we didn't get much of a chance to go over our stuff. They rushed us right out to do a hospital show. When we finished that we hurried back to the hotel to spend a little more time with our laundry. Clean laundry had become an obsession; the shirt I was wearing was a Manhattan, and the Indians wouldn't have taken it back.

One of the first things I did was to take off the green linen suit Colonel David had given me when we first hit Algiers. I gave it back to Colonel David. It was a dirty trick. He must have been sorry to see it. It was certainly a sorry-looking suit. That same Wednesday afternoon, we did a show for a terrific mob of service people in a great big ball park outside Algiers. And there, for the first time since we left England, we had a band to work with. It was a great Army outfit called Griffin's Band, and it was just the thing for the broadcast we still hadn't written. If you can get a good enough band, you don't have to write much. Look what the writers get away with on that Philharmonic broadcast.

So I asked whom I had to talk to about getting the Griffin Band for our broadcast, and I was told the Colonel lived about "eight thousand miles" out of Algiers. I said, "Get me a jeep."

In case you're wondering, there *are* telephones in North Africa. Field telephones—and the mosquitoes have to dial your numbers for you. But by the time you find a guy's number and get the number and find he has gone somewhere else and then get that number, you could have been there and back in a jeep. Anyway, it was best we didn't phone him.

He was way out in the middle of nowhere all by himself, and he appreciated anybody making the long trip to pay him a visit, no matter why. I think that, as much as anything,

made him go to all the trouble of canceling some of the band's regular commitments so they could play our broadcast.

All this took place between Wednesday noon and Wednesday evening, as full an afternoon as I ever care to have: two shows, a complete change of linen, and a long jeep ride. Right after dinner Tony and I got together with the band, took them to the studio in the Red Cross building, and started setting up and balancing for the broadcast the following day. It took quite some time, and then Tony took over and began arranging the music.

Block said, "This is going to be great . . . but we haven't a script." So we went back to the hotel and started to work. The whole thing was confused like the early days of radio when nobody knew what he was doing. Of course, twenty years later, the situation remains unchanged. Still nobody knows what he's doing, only now everybody gets paid for being an expert at it.

We sat around my room for about an hour trying to whip up an omelet out of the notes we'd made in Sicily and at Kairouan. Finally Block said, "We need a drink."

He went to look for one and came back without anything, not even water. But he said, "I met a friend of yours down in the lobby. His name's Quentin Reynolds. I told him he could see you tomorrow." I turned pale.

The man doesn't live who can brush off Quent and survive. We figured to see a lot of Reynolds before the evening was over. And before we could get back to what we were still calling work, there was a knock on the door. It was John Steinbeck.

He said he didn't want to bother us. He just wanted to see how a broadcast was written. He also wanted to talk and wanted to hear about where we'd been and what we'd been doing. So we talked for quite a while. Finally John asked if we wanted to see something really funny.

I still had but one purpose—to get the broadcast in shape—but I asked John what he had to show us. He said, “Downstairs the British Consul has a big double room. Two weeks ago Quent Reynolds dropped in for a drink, went out, came back with four friends, and they’ve all been living there ever since.”

“That I have to see,” I said, forgetting all about the broadcast, and we went downstairs to call on the crowded Consul.

John hadn’t exaggerated. The Consul’s room looked like a combination of the Sanger family in *The Constant Nymph*, the Joad family in Steinbeck’s own book *The Grapes of Wrath*, the Jeeter Lester family in *Tobacco Road*, and the Hope family in Cleveland.

The Consul was asleep in one bed. Bruce Cabot, who’d come down from Tunis, was sleeping in another. Clark Lee was on a cot right in front of the door, blocking all traffic through the room and suffering with an ulcerated tooth. H. R. Knickerbocker was sleeping on the floor in a little stagelike alcove by the window, and in the far corner of the room was some obscure correspondent who’d wandered in and gone to sleep. Nobody knew him. Reynolds was the only one on his feet. He stood in the middle of this whole thing and emceed the sleepers.

As we entered he made some insulting remarks about Block and apologized to me for having just used the last of the liquor. But he said he knew where he could get some more. If there was anyone in Algiers who would, it would be Quent.

He took us down the hall and introduced us to a Britisher, whose exact job and duties I can only guess at, and whose official title I’d better not mention. He had a room loaded with Scotch, much of which, I imagine, he used for various reasons in his business. He had loads of liquor, so we loaded up. At a little after three we went to bed.

The next morning we really had to get to work on the

broadcast. I woke up with my mouth feeling like the inside of a Russian horse doctor's valise. It was pretty grim. But we got a lot of the Red Cross secretaries and the one we'd brought with us from Bône, and started them all typing on something. We also started holding auditions for the soldier-actors we needed to play some of the bits Block and I had written in our madness—and the word “written” was never used more loosely.

We also ran into all kinds of mechanical difficulties. They had only three outlêts for mikes. So we had to plan on moving our sound-effects mike over to the band between sketches. We did get plenty of help, though, from Captain André Baruch, the ex-CBS announcer, who announced the show for us. He even worked out a complicated “crash” sound effect out of a couple of old tin cans. We'd never have gotten on the air without Baruch.

Tony was busily copying parts for the band and rehearsing them bar by bar as he finished copying . . . Block was rehearsing the actors we'd hired . . . Frances was singing . . . everybody was telling everybody what to do . . . and in the middle of it was just me and my headache. Then at the moment when everything looked most hopeless (and that's not a pun), in walks Mike Cullen and says, “Eisenhower's aide, Major Hill, wants you to see his chief.”

So we knocked off and went to see “Ike.”

Meeting General Eisenhower in the midst of that deadly muddle was like a breath of fresh air in a lethal chamber. It quieted us all, brought us all back to our senses, and in every way paid us off for the whole trip.

The first thing Eisenhower said was, “I understand you've had some excitement on your trip. Well, you're perfectly safe here in Algiers. We're well protected by guns and planes and warships. We haven't had a bombing in three months. We're too strong for 'em here. They can't get in.” That was a comforting thought. It meant we'd get some sleep that night after the broadcast, which was at midnight.



Everybody was telling everybody what to do . . . and in the middle of it was just me and my headache.

Besides General Eisenhower we met one of his right-hand men, Commander Harry C. Butcher of the Navy, formerly Vice-President of the Columbia Broadcasting System. Discovering that the Army and Navy worked so closely together was exciting to me. It meant most of the gossip about the rivalry between the services was worth about as much as most gossip is worth.

We talked to Eisenhower much longer than I thought he'd talk to people like us. And he flattered us not only by being so gracious, but by knowing where we'd been and what we'd been doing. I've found out the bigger a man is the more he knows about the other fellow and the more important details

become to him. We asked the General to go on the broadcast with us, hoping he'd say yes, but knowing he couldn't. After he'd explained why he couldn't, however, we felt we were being big meanies to have a broadcast he couldn't be on. One of his jobs is keeping the British and us on happy terms, and he asked especially if we'd done any shows for the RAF, as he didn't want those boys to be neglected.

To me he'll always be one of our great Americans. Funny thing, too, he talks a little like Gable. He has somewhat the same tonal registers. I guess we spent about forty-five minutes with Eisenhower, and when we left he thanked us for what we'd been doing and complimented us on our behavior record. That was kind of thrilling to me. It was the first time I ever got A in deportment.

We asked him for pictures, and he gave us our choice of a few, but complained that nobody ever picked out the pose he liked. As he said good-by he told us he nearly played a dirty trick by inviting us over to see him the night before. I asked why that would have been a dirty trick. He said, "We were showing your picture *They Got Me Covered*."

The rest of the day we put in at the Red Cross building preparing the broadcast. I mean the rest of the day except for a big afternoon show we did at which we ran into Stubby Kaye, who was heading a unit getting ready to play Eisenhower's North African time. When we got back we found that slowly the broadcast had begun to take shape.

About five minutes before we went on the air, Tony turned to me and said, "As long as I'm going to lead the band through this thing, don't you think I ought to have a script?"

We hunted around and finally found a few odd pages. I gave these to Tony and told him to watch me.

"Who are you going to watch?" Tony asked.

"I'll be watching the door," I said. "If anybody comes in with a threatening look I'll whistle three times and we'll duck out the back. In case we get separated, meet me at the corner of Hollywood and Vine in three weeks."

André Baruch handed me a set of earphones. In New York I heard a guy saying, "For a special broadcast by Bob Hope, who is somewhere in North Africa, we take you now to Algiers."

Baruch then said, "From somewhere in North Africa, through the co-operation of the United States Army and U.S.O. Camp Shows, we bring you Bob Hope with Frances Langford, Tony Romano, and Jack Pepper. And now, here he is in person, Bob Hope."

I've started a lot of monologues in my life, but for some reason or other that one from Algiers was the most exciting. Even the same old jokes took on a new importance and seemed to me to have vital significance. As I worked I could hear Baruch and Pepper in back of me moving our three mikes around to be in the right places for the next thing on the program, and I wondered what the next thing was. Without bothering to look, I announced Frances, and Baruch arrived with a mike for her to sing into at the very moment she started singing. It was pretty hectic. Almost as bad as my regular Tuesday shows.

And like my Tuesday shows, the problem was not getting off the air on time but staying on the air for the half hour.

To show what gluttons we were for punishment, after we finished the broadcast we climbed five flights of stairs to the fifth floor of the Red Cross building to listen to the records. The lack of power had grounded all the elevators in Algiers. After I heard the record I rushed back to the hotel and packed to be ready to get out of town at a moment's notice.

Somewhere during the day we picked up Bill Lang of *Time Magazine*, and he stayed in my room and slept on the floor. Block and I had the beds. We hit the sack about three fifteen, after giving the broadcast a thorough post-mortem, and at four twenty I heard Pepper pounding on my door hollering, "Bob! Air raid! Go to the shelter!" I was in the shelter before he'd finished saying it. It was a wine cellar, with no more wine left in it, way down under the hotel. I

figured the air raid so soon after we'd been on the air must be the air getting even.

When we got down into the shelter we found no excitement and very little apprehension. Nobody seemed frightened. Jack lay down and snored through the whole raid. He was louder than the bombing. Bill Lang and I were sitting talking quietly when Stubby Kaye came in and sat down on the bench with us. The bench collapsed with a terrific crash. That really scared everyone. We were all a little touchy.

After we'd been in the shelter for about half an hour and heard no bombs dropping, Block said, "Let's go up to the lobby and see what's doing." We went up and looked around. There was nothing to see. It was all blacked out and smoked over.

We hung around up there in the lobby looking toward the harbor and being brave till all of a sudden the vooming started. I said, "Let's go down in the cellar." Too bad, too. I'd like to have seen that. For an hour and forty minutes the German bombers kept coming around and trying to get through the screen of flak and fighters Eisenhower had put up around Algiers. The warships in the harbor and all the land guns and the fighter planes and the bombs dropping made the kind of noise that makes you tremble.

Down in the shelter you stiffen against every shock. And down in that shelter in Algiers was the only time I ever saw Frances lose her beautiful poise. When we were lost over Alaska, during the raids on Bizerte and Palermo she'd stayed perfectly calm. But cooped up in a bomb shelter under Algiers she began to tremble and cry. For once in my life I had a chance to be the big strong man. I put her head on my shoulder and held her close to me, so we sort of trembled in unison.

The tension was finally broken when I happened to remember a story Captain Watkins, one of the fighter pilots we'd met in Tunis, had told us about this same shelter. He

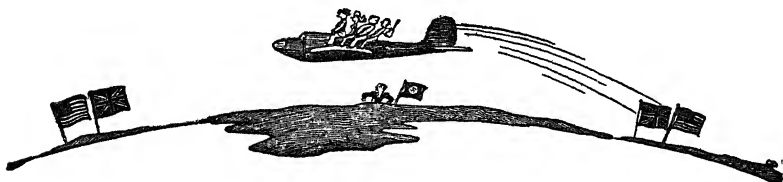
was on leave in Algiers and had come down into the shelter during a raid. A woman was hysterical, screaming and carrying on as the bombs dropped. Finally Captain Watkins went over to comfort her and said, "Don't worry, lady. Don't be frightened. I'm a fighter pilot." This seemed to strike a chord somewhere near her funny bone. She pulled herself together, looked at him, and said, "What the hell are you doing down *here?*"

The all-clear didn't sound until about six o'clock. Our plane was scheduled to leave for Marrakech and Prestwick at eight. We didn't stand a chance of catching it. So we gave up the idea entirely.

Frances and I went into the hotel dining room. The whole city was smudged up from the smoke we'd let off to cover the target and from the guns and bombs. The streets were deeply littered with pieces of flak. Pretty soon Tony and Jack joined us in the dining room. We were the only ones there. So we had a glass of water.

All of a sudden a kid came up and asked if we'd like some food. I should just have said, "Yes." But I said, "What have you got?" He went away and came back with tomato juice, bacon, and hot cakes. After breakfast we went to our rooms and slept till it was time to leave for the Algiers airport to catch the plane for England.

At the airport they took a look at our tickets and told us we had a Four Priority and might have to lay over in Marrakech four or five weeks, which would have necessitated cancelling some dates we planned to play on the way home. So I climbed into a car and whipped back to Algiers, where I



saw Colonel David and he got Captain Urquhart, who'd come over from England on the plane with us, right to work on it, and pretty soon the Captain came back with a Two Priority, which got us right through.

Captain Urquhart also gave us a message from Major Buron Fitts, who was the officer in charge of priorities. I'd met him back home when he was District Attorney in Los Angeles. I had to go to Algiers so the D.A. of L.A. could give me the O.K. to amscray to G.B.

We got the seven-thirty plane that evening for Prestwick on the first leg home.

CHAPTER 12



Frost in War, Frost in Peace, and Frost in the Hearts of Our Countrymen

THE way to get to like English weather is to go to London direct from the North African desert. So London seemed the most marvelous place in the world after an uneventful trip from Marrakech by way of Prestwick.

We had only a few days in London, and we all planned using them for the same purpose—to relax. Frances, Jack, Tony, and I had really been run ragged, and if *I* felt the strain it must have been terrible on them. It's not that I'm Superman. It's just that there's something wrong with me. I seem to recharge as I discharge energy. Doctors say I have remarkable nerves.

Motion-picture producers and directors, radio sponsors and audiences have also commented on my nerve.

We'd stayed at Claridge's the first time we went through London. It was, therefore, suggested that this time we try the Savoy. The suggestion came from Claridge's.

When we checked in we told them we were anxious to get a little quiet, so they gave us some rooms way off where we couldn't disturb anyone. Civilization certainly seemed grand.

After sleeping under culverts in Bizerte and in wine cellars in Algiers, it sure felt different to be back in London . . . paying rent.

My room overlooked the Thames. It was a nice place to sit and think about the trip. Sometimes I'd pull a chair up to the window, sit down, and just meditate for maybe three or four minutes. But really, it was swell just to sit down and know there was nothing to do. Then the phone started to ring.

The first person to call us was Captain Burgess Meredith. He was working in a short the British Government was making to explain to our troops how to cope with English situations and traditions. He called to ask if I'd work with him. I asked if the American troops were going to derive any great benefit from the film. Buzz said he thought they would. So I told him I never turned down a benefit. He said he'd be around the next day with a script.

The next time the phone rang it was Captain John Lee Mahin, one of Hollywood's top writers, whom I'd run into in England a few weeks before at the same base I found Clark Gable. John said, "How was the trip?"

Being very British by this time, I said, "We've had it!"

"Wait a minute," John said, "I'm going to put the 'old man' on."

In a minute I heard Gable asking, "How do you feel?"

"Fine," I answered. "Just relaxing and taking it easy."

"Did you see any action?"

"Enough!"

"Stand by! I'll be right over. I want to get a load of this."

So Clark and John dropped around, and we gabbed for a couple of hours, then went out to dinner.

The next day we all slept late. And when Meredith arrived with the script for the picture, Frances, Jack, and Tony were in my room helping me look out the window. Naturally, he got right to work . . . helping us admire the Thames.

It wasn't long before we'd talked ourselves into taking a nice walk along that peaceful-looking river. A week later the Germans were back dropping bombs all over it.

While we were walking Buzz told me we were going to shoot the short in the court (sounds like jive talk—"shoot the short in the court, sport") of Westminster Abbey. When I showed up for shooting the next morning I saw that Westminster Abbey had "had it" too. One part of it had been entirely unroofed by the blitz.

There's a soldier's club called "The Churchill Club" right in Westminster Abbey. It's just a small resting place, but charming. And we waited there for the cameramen to set up and get ready for the picture. It was being directed by Anthony Asquith, the guy who directed that fine picture *Pygmalion*.

Tony Asquith told me the difference between making pictures in London and in Hollywood. In England when you make a movie even the weather is against you. In Hollywood the weatherman gets a shooting schedule from all the major studios and then figures out where he can fit in a little rain without upsetting Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer too much.

In Hollywood if you want to make a picture anywhere, you've got the cops on your side. It's not that way in London. The bobbies chased us right out of Westminster Abbey courtyard. And right in the middle of a scene, too.

Asquith had just said, "Let's hurry this one through and try to get it right the first time." Buzz and I started going through a little piece of business which I can't remember now because I was thinking about a guy I saw out of the corner of my eye steaming toward us in a menacing way. I figured he might be a Paramount exhibitor gunning for me. Or, if it was a crank, I thought the bobbies would stop him before he broke up the scene. But nobody stopped this character. He walked right up in front of the camera, waved his arms, and hollered, "Stop!"

Asquith muttered, "Oh, my God," and then walked out and very politely asked the guy what he wanted. The intruder looked and acted like a landlord who'd come for his rent. "You know you can't stay here," he said. "The Dean wants you off the place at once!"



*In England you don't argue with the bobby,
because bobby socks.*

Tony started to protest. He said, "Please, we have only this one very short scene left to do. . . ."

But the guy from the Dean's office kept shaking his head.

and pretty soon one of those terrifically calm and efficient London bobbies strolled over and said, "Here now, if he says to leave, you'd better leave. Get along with you now." So we did. In England you don't argue with the bobby, because bobby socks.

But before I left I wandered through Westminster Abbey for a while, looking at what was left of a lot of beautiful things. I'm a lousy sightseer, though. I think things are grand when I'm looking at them; then when someone asks me what I saw, I'm dead.

By the time I got back to the Savoy, reporters had already started calling up to check on the story that I'd been thrown out of Westminster Abbey. There were headlines to that effect in all the London newspapers, and Buzz Meredith phoned to apologize for getting me into such a mess. Can you imagine one actor apologizing to another ham for getting his name on the front page of all the newspapers in one of the world's greatest cities? Shows how war will change a guy.

The next day we went to Kensington Park and finished the scene amid a bunch of sailors on leave, kids running from their nurses . . . and nurses running from the sailors.

Our guys in England needed plenty of lessons on how to handle British money. Privates were handing English cabbies one-pound notes for tips, thinking they were dollar bills instead of about four-dollar bills. This scene was about that.

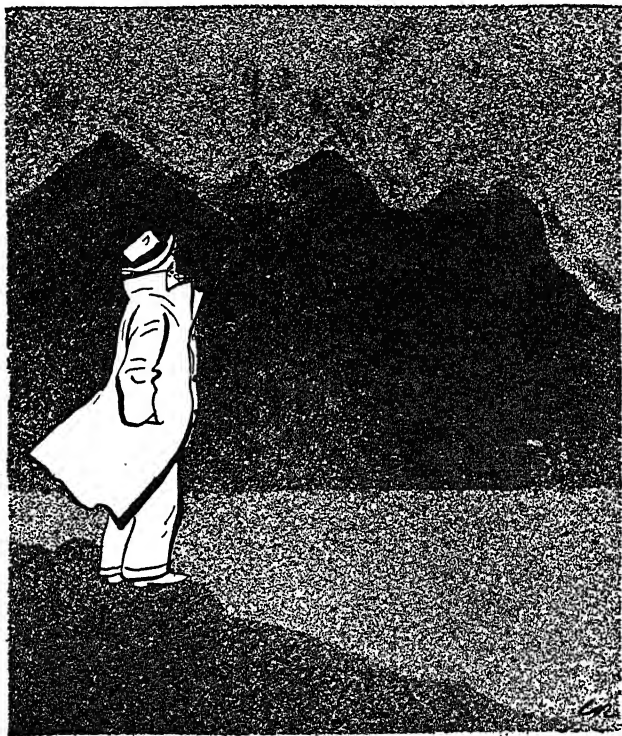
Late that afternoon we all packed and took the train for Liverpool. I wanted to catch some of Jack Hulburt and Cicely Courtneidge's new show. Caught the last act. Also I figured that in Liverpool I could get in touch with Major Strenglin at Whorton, and he might fix it for us to hitch a ride on an Army plane to Prestwick. The Major himself came down to Liverpool in an A-20, took us to Whorton, and from Whorton to Prestwick in a B-26.

At Prestwick we connected with our C-54 for Iceland and home, and landed at about five thirty that evening on an island in a fiord within easy sight of Reykjavik. They tell

me Reykjavik's a lovely city. We didn't get into it.

The town near the airport where we stopped was just a little fishing village, sort of a poor Iceland's Gloucester, Massachusetts, or Monterey, California.

The very moment we landed in Iceland, it reminded me of Alaska. My nose got red.



*Sometimes I wonder how they can tell the difference
between bad and good weather.*

While we were eating dinner at the airport word came that we wouldn't be able to leave Iceland for about twelve hours on account of bad weather. Sometimes I wonder how they can tell the difference between bad and good weather.

I'd no sooner finished telling Frances and Jack and Tony about the delay than I got another call. This was from one of the Special Service officers, who wanted to know if we'd do a few shows as long as we were laying over. Slogan for Iceland: "Lay over and lay an egg." He said he could arrange for three shows, so we did three.

Two of the shows we did in Iceland were at the Special Service Theater near the airport. When the word went around that we were on the island and prepared to perform, you could see the F.B.I.s high-tailing it for the theater from every direction. The F.B.I. is what the men up there call themselves—F.B.I. . . . forgotten bastards of Iceland.

A pfc from Kentucky told me about a strange Icelandic animal called the Key bird. The Key bird has a nest in the side of a hill, and every morning just at dawn it comes out, looks around, and says, "Key-Ryste, it's cold!"

The guys up there complained the same as they did in Alaska that there was nothing around but blubber. Which must be why they all stayed up all night . . . to chew the fat.

After we did the two shows at the Special Service Theater, they told us they were having a servicemen's show at the Red Cross, so we went over to be the intermission. It was marvelous. Those kids didn't even know we were in town. They're all sitting around waiting for the second act to go on and a guy comes out and says, "Frances Langford, Jack Pepper, Tony Romano, and Bob Hope are here. Would you like them to do a show for you?" The guys thought it was a gag, so there was just one big groan. It was the biggest groan I've ever heard. Then I started telling a few jokes, and I heard a bigger one.

I want to go back to Iceland. I want to spend at least as much time there as I spent in Alaska. Here's one of the reasons. It's part of a letter written by Sergeant John Tully, Jr., of the 118th Infantry in Iceland to Mrs. Tully. She sent me the letter, saying, "If you ever plan another trip would you

consider these lonesome, weary boys in Iceland?" And "At any time you'd want to use any of John's letter, I know he'd be only too glad to have you do so."

Here are the parts of John's letter I want to use:

The Red Cross presented a play, Heaven Can Wait, with a cast selected from a group of Base Special Service workers . . . the play was excellent . . . and during intermission the Red Cross director announced that he had a surprise . . . the surprise . . . Bob Hope, Frances Langford, Tony Romano, and Jack Pepper . . . you know I shouted and clapped my hands like a fool. [Why did he have to say "like a fool"?)

They're my boy and girl. [Thanks, Dad!] Frances sang a couple of songs . . . 'You Made Me Love You' etc. . . . Tony was the man with the voice and guitar . . . Jack sang too. [I sang, too, but does he mention it?]

Don't know how to express my joy at being fortunate enough to see them . . . the show was not a scheduled one. The Hope man had just completed a tour and was on his way home . . . weather held him over and in that way we got the surprise of our lives.

Everybody just goes through our little rock never stopping. . . . I'm still all thrilled, should be, as only eight of us in our company saw them . . . glad they got a taste of the weather up here . . . what a reaction a person has after seeing something like that. We've been isolated so long that the least bit of excitement slays us. We're like a country boy going to the big city for the first time. I wonder if the performers realize the wonderful work they're doing?

I wonder if you realize the wonderful work you're doing, son?

Really the only difference between Iceland and Alaska is that in Iceland the natives talk Icelandic and drink Danish beer, and in Alaska they talk jive and drink Seven Up.

In both places they live in those big Quonset Huts that look like half a barrel lying on its side. The guys in Alaska and Iceland not only live in a barrel, they're over one half the time. In both places they want to see action, they're tired of sitting around, they're lonesome. They want to get home.

Down in the Caribbean area they're really lonesome. For two years many of them have been guarding the seaways to Casablanca, constantly ready for action, never getting any of it. Never really knowing or even being part of what's going on. Pat O'Brien says those guys call their theater of operations "The Forgotten Frontier."

Pat got pretty deep into the jungle. "Deeper," he says, "than any other performer except Wini Shaw. There's a gal who really did a great job down in the Caribbean islands and along the northern shore of South America. Wherever I went," Pat continued, "the guys kept hollering, 'Where's Wini? When's Wini coming back?' "

Pat said some of those guys are so lonesome they just come up and touch you. No wonder they wanted Wini! Who wouldn't rather touch her than Pat O'Brien?

What a postwar world it's going to be, though, with the head-hunters in New Guinea along the route once taken by Pat O'Brien singing "Shame, Shame on Old Notre Dame." And he says when he played Paramaribo, in Dutch Guiana, the audience was naturally predominantly Dutch. Pat claimed he did okay with his forty minutes. But I'd still like to have a record of O'Brien singing "Shake Hands with Your Uncle Hans."

A couple of other guys did a sensational job of helping to relieve the monotony in that theater of operations: Ray Bolger and Little Jack Little. I'm told they had a trick of getting on the stage and starting the show that was a honey. I'm thinking of stealing it.

Ray and Jack would dress up in G.I. sun tans and go onto the stage and start moving things around, fixing the mike,

tuning the piano. Finally, when they'd created enough indignation and wonderment at what two Dogface Joes were doing on the stage, Ray would walk up to the mike and say, "Well, let's start the show." Jack Little would begin to play, and that was their opening. Ray's dancing and Jack's piano playing must have really looped them in those outposts.

Except that it's jungle instead of tundra, the Caribbean is just like Alaska. It's just hot and monotonous and lonesome instead of cold and monotonous and lonesome . . . sort of baked Alaska.

I seem to have strayed pretty far from Iceland. To get back, it was kind of late by the time we returned to the hotel at the airport after the Red Cross show. And once again we were all just as tired out as we had been when we returned from Africa. There's something strangely exhausting about facing such exciting audiences in such rapid succession. Your neck gets tired ducking stuff.

The thing is, you're never "off." You talk to the guys before the show, then you do the show, and after the show you go right on talking to them. I can remember when the top of vaudeville was the two-a-day. When you work for the U.S.O. Camp Shows you do one-a-day, but it lasts all day and far into the night. And any guy who can do it and doesn't is a fool. If he doesn't do it for what *he* can give the men, then he should do it for what they can give *him*.

As I was pulling off my shoes getting ready for bed in Iceland, the fog started rolling in my window just as the fog had rolled in off Monterey Bay the night I was there waiting for the word for us to proceed to San Francisco and grab a plane for Seattle and Alaska. But that night in Monterey a telegram arrived saying the trip was off, that there wasn't enough time to make it and get back to Seattle for the first Pepsodent show in the 1942-43 series.

It's tough to take a disappointment like that. So I sent this wire to Major General Simon Buckner, who was in command

of all the troops in the Alaskan area: "Four Thespians, bags packed with songs and witty sayings, ready to tour your territory, have been informed, due to lack of time, trip is off. Please let us make trip and will take our chances. Best regards. (Signed) Frances Langford, Tony Romano, Jerry Colonna, and Bob Hope."

In about twelve hours we received this answer: "You leave Thursday. (Signed) General Buckner."

So the four of us rendezvoused in San Francisco, got a United Air Lines plane to Seattle, and from Seattle on up we went Pan American over some of the most beautiful country I've ever seen. Straight up the coast we flew, through Juneau and Whitehorse to Fairbanks.

As soon as we stepped off the plane at Fairbanks I was disappointed. I'd expected to be met by a couple of totem poles. No kidding, I was looking for Eskimos, and there wasn't a soul around the airport who would have looked out of place in Wichita, Kansas.

The two guys who flew us around Alaska—that is, from Fairbanks to Nome and all over the route—were Marvin Setzer of Pomona, California, and Bob Gates of Aberdeen, South Dakota. Imagine, after all the gags I've pulled about Pomona, how I felt having a Pomona guy for a pilot.

I called Bob "Growing Pains" . . . he was a great big long stretch. I called Marvin "Junior" because he was the youngest. They called me "Dad." It was while in Alaska that we started calling Frances "Mother" Langford.

Our first and only stop on the way from Fairbanks to Nome was at a spot on the Yukon River called Galena. Came down for gas. I wanted to see a doctor so they drove me over to a fella named Lieutenant Merrit, of Omaha, Nebraska. He had a little hospital that I never want to be sick in. It made me well just looking at it. His instruments were on top of a pot-bellied stove, and his operating table was a cot propped up on some boxes.

But he was a good doctor, gave me some "advice" that cured me, and we all went over to "spit" in the Yukon River and become sour-doughs. Before taking off from Galena we did a fast show off the back end of a truck.

It got kind of rough flying into Nome as we neared the Bering Strait. But it never got as rough as it was for those guys who'd been serving there for two years. They were the ones who greeted me with "Welcome to Devil's Island."

The difference between Fairbanks and Nome made it clear why the guys called Nome "Devil's Island" and why everyone called Fairbanks "The Country Club of Alaska." We went right to work doing shows for small groups in one Quonset Hut after another. They were a tough audience, those guys in Nome. They'd been sore so long they didn't want to thaw out. It wasn't their kind of country in the first place. A lot of them were from Alabama. Their commanding officer was General Jones, formerly of the Alabama National Guards.

But when those kids did finally warm up it was terrific. We came out of one hut, and there were about six hundred of them standing in the rain. We tried to do a show, but if Tony had gotten out his guitar it would have shrunk so fast he'd have been playing the second chorus on a ukulele. So we packed the whole six hundred guys into one Quonset Hut that normally could hold about three hundred. Now I really know what it means to work to a packed house. We were working on the stove. The kids were all standing on each other's tiptoes.

While this was going on the Army had arranged for the overflow to be taken care of in a big hall downtown in Nome, so that's where we played next. After that General Jones took us to the Polar Bar, where we had reindeer steaks. Now I know why Santa Claus drives his reindeer instead of eating them.

It was in Nome, too, that I got my first taste of powdered eggs and powdered milk, and I still think the best place to serve them is in the powder room.



*Now I know why Santa Claus drives his reindeer
instead of eating them.*

Early in the morning we took off from Nome for Bethel, where we were to play a hospital. It's a long flight over all kinds of barren country from icy Norton Sound and rugged tundra to high snowy mountains and heavy forests. It's simply magnificent scenery, as long as you don't try to join it.

The things that worried me most, flying over the mountains, were the live volcanoes. We saw some on the flight from Nome to Anchorage. It's silly, of course, to worry over live volcanoes when you're in a plane; because when you're in a plane you can rise above such things.

When we arrived at Fort Richardson, in Anchorage, General Buckner and Colonel Eddie Post took us in tow. The

General invited us over to his house, and we played a lot of ping-pong, and I told him about *The Outside*, and he told me about the men in his command.

The Outside is what everyone in Alaska calls anywhere else in the world. But what General Buckner told me about the soldiers in Alaska was pretty revealing. "They've been there a long time, and a lot of them were suffering from one form or another of "cabin fever"—that's nothing but too long and too intimate an association with the same places and faces. General Buckner said our trip up there was a tonic to the men's spirit that money couldn't buy. In other words, what they needed was a battle, or just some sign from home that they weren't forgotten.

They've had plenty of those signs in the last eighteen months. Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, Joe E. Brown, Al Jolson, and lots of other U.S.O. units with young performers, pretty girl singers, and budding young comics have been up there. The youngsters sometimes don't get the proper appreciation from anyone here at home. But the men they play for love them.

And while I'm on the subject of entertainers in the arctic, old Gravel Gullet, Andy Devine, did a tour up through Greenland and Labrador and up around the Hudson Bay country . . . probably looking for Paul Muni. Andy's unit was a little three-piece combo featuring a young singer named Mary Elliott, a piano player named Sergeant Chuck Broadhurst whom they picked up in the Far Northeast, and Andy.

Andy says the guys in that part of the north gave him a parka that fit all right in the back but made a sort of inverted V for Vrozen over the Devine belly.

"I had to lie down on my stomach every once in a while to keep it warm," Andy squeaked. "The parka they gave me was always about three sheeps to the wind."

There was a place in Canada called *Watson Lake* that was

plenty windy. It blew through the trees so hard it sounded like wolves. We were told there were about thirteen hundred construction engineers over on the Alcan Highway who would like us to do a show for them. I said bring 'em in. And man, did they come!

They arrived in everything from jeeps to bulldozers. One G.I. from Indiana who was working on the highway told us how they were getting it done so fast. He said they brought a lot of Negroes up from Mississippi, started them south, and said, "That's the way home—go to work!" They worked fast.

We played for a bunch of the RAF at Annette and pushed on to Cordova, where we stopped for the night. I said to Marvin Setzer, "If the weather's good, I'd like to take a chance and go on."

He examined the charts and stuff and said it looked "good and clear," so we took off for Anchorage on our first and only night flight in Alaska.

We'd only been up about ten minutes when the sleet and hail started hitting us. We should have turned back. But we thought it was only local and that we could fly out of it. It kept getting worse and worse till finally when we got to Anchorage we couldn't find the field. Being lost in the sky around Anchorage is being lost in a place where you can bump into things.

We were about thirteen or fourteen thousand feet in the air. So were the mountains. Anchorage lies in a sort of saucer. After we'd been cruising around in this soup for about twenty minutes, Marvin Setzer called, "Dubowsky!" He was the crew chief.

Dubowsky went forward and whispered with the pilots for a minute and then came back and pointed toward Frances and said, "Come here."

Frances walked forward, and Dubowsky handed her a Mae West and a parachute. "Put these on," he said. "If we have to abandon ship, pull this. If you land in water, pull *this*!"

I turned to Captain Don Adler, the Special Service officer who was with us, and asked, "What *about* this?"

"Doesn't look good," he said.

Why is it that in the most tense situations the talk is duller?

One by one Dubowsky gave us Mae Wests, parachutes, and instructions. I thought of all the lousy parachute gags I'd pulled, and suddenly none of them seemed funny.

To make it worse, another plane was also trying to get into Anchorage. Once we felt its prop-wash. That's how close we came to colliding. Tony sat there, a delicate shade of char-treuse, and said, "This sort of thing isn't good for a guitar."

Colonna stroked his mustache and said, "I'll bet they'll forget to have the station wagon pick us up."

Frances said nothing, but later confessed she was hoping we'd have to jump.

I don't ever want to crash a party again.

After a lot of ship-to-ground talk they figured how to get us in. They took all the searchlights in the neighborhood, made a cone of light, and we rode right down the cone. I gave the pilots a watch saying "Thanks for my life."

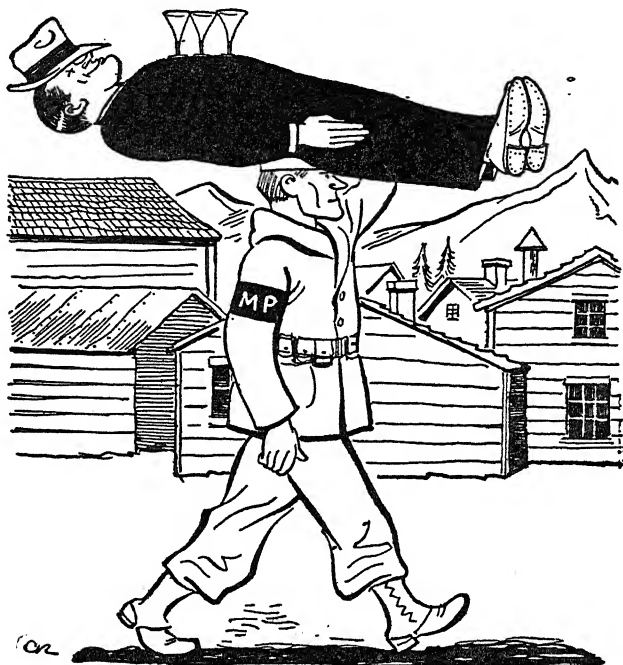
We waited in Anchorage two days for the weather to clear.

The second night, after we'd played shows everywhere we could, three sailors came over to our table in a small night spot and started talking to us. They wanted to buy us drinks, but we wouldn't let them because we didn't want them to spend all their dough. Finally they left, and after they'd gone a waiter came over with eight champagne cocktails. The sailors had ordered them for us before they blew.

Those drinks meant a lot. They were bought in real sincerity. If they'd been transportable I think we'd have carried them home. As it was, we drank them and we were carried home.

When we finally were able to get out of Anchorage, we headed for the Aleutians; hit Naknek and then jumped to

Unimak Island and Cold Bay, where I was welcomed by another General Jones. I began to wonder about Irving Berlin's



As it was, we drank them and we were carried home.

song that starts: "This is the Army, Mister Jones." It seemed all the Joneses in the Army were generals.

There was a guy I knew from Bel-Air—that's a swanky suburb of Beverly Hills—at Cold Bay, and I asked General Jones if I could see him. His name is Corporal Nicholette.

"He'll be here," the General said. And in a few minutes Nick came in. His eyes started to bug out, and he leaned over and touched the floor and said, "Rugs!" Funny kind of crack to come out of a guy who'd spent his life in the luxurious surroundings of a Bel-Air home. It showed how long he'd been up in the Aleutians.

At Unimak we did a show for about three thousand guys, and in the evening we went around playing the huts the way we'd done at Nome. Next morning we got a clearance for the farthest outpost on the Aleutians, Umnak! We asked General Jones if we could take Nick with us.

He said, "Sure. But don't forget to bring him back."

At Umnak we landed on one of those mesh runways you see pictures of. The Army and Navy now have sort of life-sized Meccano sets out of which they can build almost anything they need at a moment's notice. Part of the outfit is this mesh-steel runway that makes a landing field out of a soggy marsh.

We found another big bunch of guys on Umnak that had just come back from a bombing mission. I guess Umnak was as close as we got to actual fighting until we hit Sicily.

While Frances was singing, General Butler pointed and said to me, "Look at that kid down there."

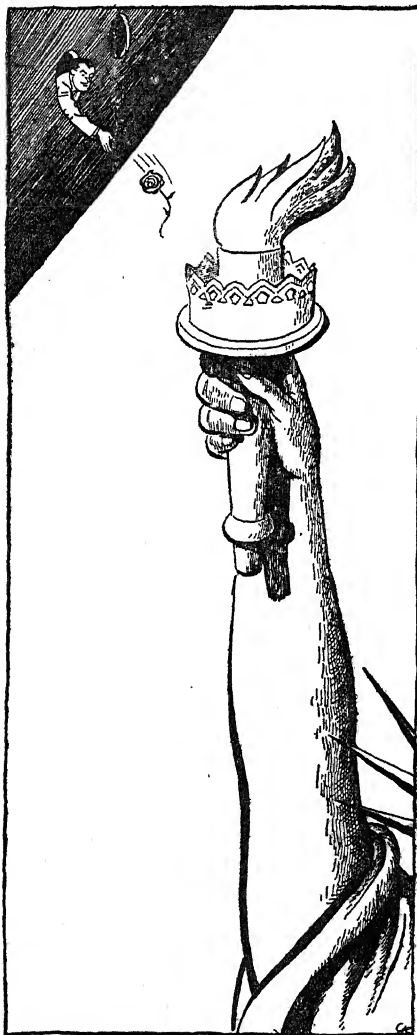
He was crying. And his buddy's arm was around him. He didn't dare look up. Frances' singing had brought some little part of home to him. The General couldn't get over that kid crying. Later, while we were eating, the General said, "I can't get over that man crying. I wish you could stay and do a few more shows."

I told him how I'd love to but we had to head back. Later I received a letter saying, "You may tell Miss Langford that she was the first white woman to set foot on Umnak Island and that my men now call her Virginia Dare Langford."

We dropped Nicholette and headed back to Anchorage. I was sorry we'd had to miss Dutch Harbor, but there wasn't a prayer of getting in there. The fog was right on the ground. I heard that the last planes to get through to Dutch Harbor had to fly so low their altimeters were reading in knots.

On the way down we spent the night again in Anchorage, did a show at a hospital there, and then on the way to do a show at the Red Cross we passed a saloon called "Café Society

... *Way Uptown.*" That Red Cross place is a sensational spot for the guys. It looks like some rich man's hunting lodge—moose heads and all. But we have to leave Alaska now because we haven't left Iceland yet.



We had quite an interesting group as we took off the next morning with Captain Bob Buck as our pilot and John Van Duren our navigator. Besides our group we had as passengers Lady Dill, wife of Field Marshal Dill, and one of the veterans of that big raid over Schweinfurt, Colonel Bernie Lae, who wrote "I Wanted Wings." We also had two casualties: a Negro boy who was being rushed back to Walter Reed for an eye operation and a kid they were bringing from the Middle East who needed a special brain operation. Both these men were attended by a Medical Corps major.

We had to fly kind of high getting out of Iceland, and the pressure bothered the guy with the brain trouble so badly they had to hold him down.

The clouds were hanging pretty low over Man-

hattan as we came in. And it was a tremendous thrill to break through the overcast and see the New York sky line and that grand old gal standing there in the harbor carrying the same torch that those half million men we had played for and talked to in Europe were carrying . . . the Torch of Liberty.

What she stands for is what they're battling for . . . and they know it. When they come back they expect to see the same old girl in the harbor and the same old girl at the station waiting for them.

This war has been a great and good education to a couple of million men. They've learned history and made history. They've learned geography and practically remade it. And they've become articulate. The number of books being written about this war, while it's going on, *must* help to keep history on the level for a change.

And it may make a lot of guys appreciate things they used to take for granted. Being back in the States where rationing is dictated more by a sense of fair play than by a stern necessity was a stimulating experience. And you don't know how stimulating ham and eggs whenever you want them can be.

The first morning in the Waldorf, I phoned room service, remembering what I'd gone through with room service at Claridge's to get a cake of soap.

"Got any eggs?" I asked.

"Why not?"

"Can I get two?"

"Why not?"

"Ham?"

"I didn't say that, sir."

"I mean ham to eat."

"We have plenty of that, too, sir."

"Ice cream?"

"What flavor?"

"Send me a complete assortment."

"We're very busy, sir. Please order whatever you want. The chances are we'll have it."

I'll never forget that ice cream. Imagine a great big plate of ice cream for breakfast. It doesn't go very well with ham and eggs, but I forced myself.

I guess going without a little bit makes you appreciate what you've got and what you can have. And maybe the time you spend doing without you put in thinking. I'm sure their experiences in battle areas have made a lot of guys able to say things they never even thought of before.

A lot of normally selfish kids who used to think only of themselves are now in there fighting for and with their buddies. Men are now writing letters that indicate thought far deeper and more important than the apparent subject matter of the letters. There is one such letter that I'd like to close the book with. I think you'll see why when you read it. It was written by Lieutenant John D. Saint, Jr., to his parents, Mr. and Mrs. John D. Saint of South Claiborne Avenue, New Orleans:

Dear Mom and Dad,

My third social function since I left Fort Sam Houston was a huge success. On this occasion, Bob Hope, Frances Langford, Jack Pepper, and Tony Romano put on a show for us that we'll never forget. It was not officially announced, that I know of, but the word spread like wildfire, "Bob Hope is in town." When I arrived there was a tremendous mob. More than any football game I ever saw. We have had many arguments as to the number of thousands present. Everyone agrees that fifteen is conservative. All of a sudden Bob Hope came in riding in a command car (sedan) followed by two more. We had been listening to recordings of good American music by Glenn Miller, Harry James, and all the boys. There were few who could stay still. Bob came on the grandstand

dressed as a man on the street, baggy trousers, an ordinary coat, and an open-neck collar. Nothing fancy at all. His nose was really sunburned and caught the brunt of a lot of his own jokes. He started his patter and all of us laughed until tears were just streaming down and we couldn't see a darned thing. He has been playing Army camps a lot and has picked up the lingo. He can tell you all about lister bags, atabrine tablets, and armor artificers. That made his comments much funnier to us. He was speaking our language. Then he brought out Jack Pepper and Tony Romano, a real artist who could put more into a guitar and get more out of it than any man I've ever seen. When this happened we were almost sure Frances Langford had not come. And there were many disappointed people around. And all of a sudden Bob said, "Here's Frances Langford!" There was a din you would not believe. She was stunningly dressed, though simply. It was good to see a clean, neat American girl who spoke our language and thought like we do. She sang and she sang from the very bottom of her heart. It could not have been otherwise. First it was "You Made Me Love You." Then, "Tangerine" and then "Night and Day." The songs were mixed with patter between Hope and her, clever and funny as you can imagine. We thought it was all over and Bob Hope asked her back to sing "Embraceable You." Every one of those thousands of men then went home to their wives and sweethearts. It was almost more than a man could stand. That was inspired singing that touched every flea-bitten roughneck in the crowd. There was not a sound and there was not a movement. It was so good it didn't draw much applause. We were too stupid to keep up a clamor so that she'd come back. But, the amazing part of it was that Frances Langford was just a woman with a voice, a marvelous, rich, but delicate voice. And every man took it for what it was worth, not from the standpoint of Frances Langford but from the standpoint of what it meant to him in his memories. She will never know what that did to us.

We have been deprived of home, of our loved ones, and civilization for some time. For a few seconds we were back in our natural surroundings and completely happy. I could not have been closer to Mary had she been right there holding my hand. I was surprised to look up and see that it was Walter Sexauer on my right rather than Mary. It was a rude awakening. And it was doubly hard to come to the realization that we are still in Sicily, that there is a war going on, and there's not a darned thing we can do about it. I really feel that the survival of the world is certain, due to man's ability to reconstruct in his mind those things which are pleasant and dear to him. It is a fine lesson to learn but we have to learn it over and over again to keep the degree of appreciation in tune with the value of those things we love.

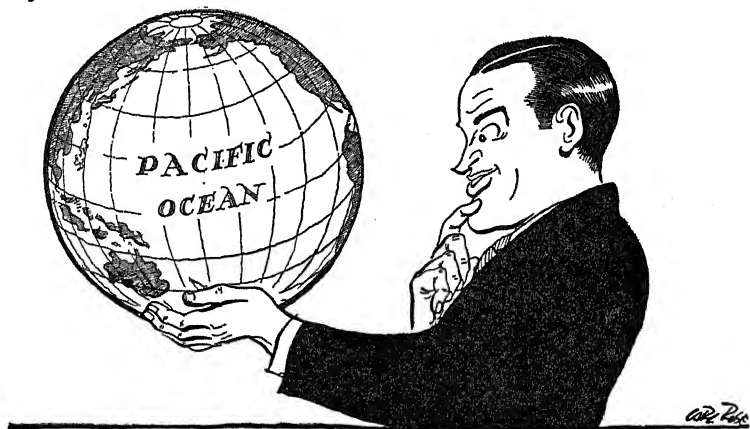
Yes, this war's making our young men think. And for one letter, chosen more or less at random from the thousands that came in, any man or woman is paid hundreds of thousands of times for anything he or she may have sacrificed or suffered for those guys.

It's fantastic. You do just a little bit for them, in comparison to what they're doing and risking for you, and you receive thousands of letters thanking you. *They thank you!*

EPILOGUE

I DIDN'T know what a galley proof was until I saw this stuff in print. I didn't know what a mad printer was until he handed it to me. This is going to make him madder. While he was sweating it out over a linotype machine, Frances, Jerry Colonna, Vera Vague, Wendell Niles, The Songbirds, and I took a trip to the Caribbean. And whether you pronounce it Caribbean or Caribbean depends on how recently you went to school. I don't pronounce it. I just think that, like the lonely men in the North, these G.I.s in the jungles and swamps of Trinidad, Puerto Rico, and Panama rate plenty of praise. They're not lucky to be there. Most of them would rather be in a battle area. It's tough to be bored to death. I know. Many a guy I've bored to death has told me.

Actually, though I wanted to play before the men in the Caribbean, who still made me feel as if I'd never left home, the trip was a little jungle warm-up for the South Pacific. And this is fair warning to the men down there. Look out. I'm coming . . . and this year.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Until the publication of this book, Bob Hope was a
radio and movie star.**

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